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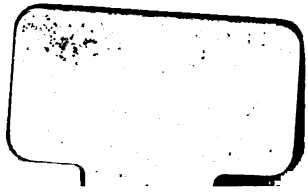

LONGLEAT.

BY

ELLERAY LAKE.

It were a breaking of God's high decree,
If Lethe should be passed, and such food tasted,
Without the cost of some repentant tear!

DANTE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
SAMPSON LOW, SON, AND MARSTON,
CROWN BUILDINGS, FLEET STREET.

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1870.

250. g. 37.

F. BENTLEY AND CO., PRINTERS, SHOE LANE, LONDON.

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LONGLEAT.

CHAPTER I.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

Oh! blessed be thine unbroken light!
That watched me as a seraph's eye,
And stood between me and the night,
For ever shining sweetly nigh.

BYRON.

THE train slowly rolled into the Manchester "Victoria Station." Margaret, depressed by disappointment, sad at parting with Charley, and anything but cheered by the view of miserable, narrow, smoke-blackened streets and chimneys over which she passed in her entrance to the town, looked far from bright to Edward as he caught sight of her before she distinguished him in the crowd. He sprang to the carriage, and in an instant her face was lighted up by her glorious smile.

"Dear Maggie!"

"Edward!"

They might have been in a desert, instead of in a crowded railway carriage; they saw and heard nothing but each other.

"Where is your luggage?" he asked.

"Manvers is here. Papa would not hear of my travelling alone."

"I thought he would have brought you."

"He could not—a summons came for Charley."

"Ah, Charley!—has he gone? our sailor laddie!"

Margaret nodded—she couldn't speak. Engines were whistling; passengers, coming in and going out, were bustling in all directions; porters were badgered as usual, looked as stolid as usual, and were as polite as railway officials always are. Anyone who has seen Mr. Frith's marvellous painting, which is only every-hour-station-life, will be able to picture the seeming confusion. They two stood alone in that moving crowd, thinking of the brave brother whose home was henceforth to be on the deep, and no one in all the throng guessed what emotion was swelling their hearts. Such things occur every day in our termini. You who want a sermon on the mutability of this mortal life, on its varied joys and sorrows, its crimes and sufferings, go to Mr. Frith's picture.

She leaned on her brother's arm. "My darling sister, it is such joy to have you." It was worth anything to hear Edward's welcome. Then came Manvers. He had seen the luggage on the cab, into which he got, following Edward's brougham. "Now, tell me something of home," he said, when they were fairly off. "What a blessing to see some one from Bronwylfa!"

Margaret looked at him anxiously. "Edward, are you quite well?"

"Why?"

"You look so pale."

"Do I?" he said, laughing. "Don't I look like a smoked haddock?"

But she was not satisfied. "If your health should fail in Manchester, what will papa say?"

"Hush Margaret! it must not fail. I need all the encouragement you can give, and all the aid that God Himself can bestow." He spoke very gravely,

"Is your task so difficult?"

"I have seen sights since I came here, Maggie, that would almost deter one from preaching, even though he rose from the dead. My only fear is that no harvest will follow."

"You have nothing to do with that, Edward," she said. "Paul plants, Apollos waters, but God giveth the increase. Do your part, He will do his."

Edward's eyes glistened as he took her hand in his. "And what about home?"

"Charley has gone, with papa and mamma. Clara goes to Ruthven on Saturday."

"To Ruthven!"

"Yes," said Margaret, looking out of the window. "The Countess is coming down on Friday. She invited me to stay with her. I, of course, could not, and, when she knew all the circumstances, she transferred the invitation to Clara. Poor child! I was very glad. She grieves sadly about Charley."

Something in his sister's manner struck Edward as peculiar. "I am sorry I urged your coming," he said, kindly. "I could have waited, and the Countess is so fond of you."

The button of Maragret's glove gave way—she had been almost tugging at it. Her cheeks were flushed. Edward let down the window. She looked out curiously.

"Have you seen our Earl lately?" he inquired.

"Yes, he was with us last evening. He promised, I mean he said, that he should sail with us to-day. Papa even got the Captain to delay our departure for a while; but he did not come."

"He changed his mind, I suppose," said Edward, carelessly. "Gentlemen"—rather emphasising the word —"often do."

He meant nothing by the remark, but somehow it struck his sister with a cold chill. In that moment she

saw clearly into the state of her own feelings. She started involuntarily. A pain smote her heart as she thought, "What have I been doing?"

She remembered, however, the Earl's words to her the evening before, and many other incidents of their intercourse came to her memory also. She could not but think that he had quite overcome his love for Helena, for he seemed so happy now when with herself; it appeared natural to her that he should seek her society, and sit by her at table: to speak the plain truth, Margaret felt as if she belonged to Lord Cranford. No dream of the future troubled her—it was present happiness. How dear to her she little knew! He was her ideal of all that was noble, and his regard for her, his appreciation, was fast becoming the most precious thing in life to Margaret. Does my fastidious lady reader blame her? It is a strange creed that a maiden may not give her heart until she has been formally asked for the gift. Love knows no such law. It is like the dawn of day, or, as has been said, it is a sudden-born emotion, springing to life as the sun bursts through the cloud, transforming the whole nature, bringing light and gladness to the life. With Margaret it had been growing and growing, fed by the Earl's own hand.

"Here we are!" said Edward, cheerfully.

Margaret looked up at his house, with its broad flight of steps, and tiny paled-in garden. How small it seemed after the gardens at home! but it looked very nice, and there, at the door was a Bronwylfa face at any rate. Hudson, Edward's housekeeper, was an old, trustworthy servant, who had lived with Mrs. Seymour ever since her marriage. Their mother felt as if she could only trust her children's new home in her care. She was very good, but drolly talkative.

"Well, Miss Marget," she said, shaking her hand heartily, and returning a noisy kiss for the one her young

lady could not help bestowing for Bronwylfa's sake; "and if it isn't a sight good for sore eyes to see you, I never know'd one! You'll do Master Edard a power of good."

"Why, what's the matter, Hudson?"

"Lord bless you! Nothing, Miss Marget; only he works so hard."

"Oh," said the young lady, "how you did frighten me! Well, he came to work hard, and so have I."

"There was allus a pair on you, since you were childre," said Hudson, taking a package from the cabman. "And, as I'm livin', yond's Manvers! He hasn't forgot his head, has he, Miss Marget?" she said, with a humorous look on her face. "It 'ud be a rare loss!"

Manvers was famed for never letting his head save his heels.

Miss Seymour laughed, and went into the dining-room, close at hand.

"Welcome to my humble Rectory," said her brother, folding her to his heart in an embrace which told his sister how very much he had needed her. He took off her bonnet, and smoothed her hair lovingly.

She looked at him anxiously.

"Edward, confess, now; are you not home-sick?" she said.

He laughed slightly, and tossed back his head—a habit he had—and stroked her cheek before he answered.

"Nay, dear," he said, "but I find what the hymn says is true:—

> 'Two are better far than one
> For counsel or for fight.'"

"Then that means you are going to be married."

They laughed heartily at the idea of such a thing; and, when Margaret was in her dressing-room, she laughed again at the thought. "Edward was such a bachelor!"

"I think you intend to spoil me," she said, when she came down. "Mamma might have prepared my rooms to-day."

"I do intend to make you so happy, you will not care to leave me soon."

"I don't think happiness would make me wish to do it," she said, so gravely, that her brother answered in Mr. Seymour's own tone—

"There you go—with your sacrifice!" At which they both laughed again—it was so like him.

"Edward, *you* cannot blame me."

"I, dear! I glory in your spirit and strength."

"I think I would stay with you so long as I could aid suffering," she said, in her quiet way.

How little she knew that in Manchester she would learn to hide an aching heart, ever seeking solace for her own misery in relieving that of others!

Thus it often is. God crowns our brow with thorns; and yet, as our drooping eyes gaze on other way-worn, bleeding feet, we forget the scarlet drops which show the agony of our pain. This is Christ's teaching in a world of tribulation.

In the course of talk, at dinner, about Edward's church and congregation, Dick and his wife were named.

"Is he only on the strike?" she inquired, innocently.

Edward smiled. "Unfortunately, it includes hundreds. It spreads like an epidemic."

"I saw a great number of men standing about, on an open space of ground, before we arrived at the station."

"They were mill-hands, and you would be surprised if you knew what hardships those men will endure for what they deem their rights."

"And I'm glad that it is so," she said, her eyes kindling in a moment. "So long as the working-classes can

and will defend their own, they are safe, their country is safe, from despotism."

"Why, Maggie," he said, "you are not going to teach my people rebellion, are you?"

"If I thought they were oppressed, I would," she said, with spirit. "But there are no riots, are there?"

"No, nor likely to be. I believe the people are too really brave."

And so they were. Manchester never suffered so severely, but Manchester never suffered so silently, as during that memorable year.

"I feel almost impatient to know your people, Edward."

"You will be an angel of light to some of them, dear. I find that men are poor comforters in sickness. By the way, my pew-opener is ill. I went to see her a day or two since. I found her quite elated because her son (strangely enough, he is Lord Cranford's valet) is coming to Manchester with the Earl. Perhaps he will call. It will be in a few weeks."

Margaret was annoyed with herself because her face flushed, and she could not say as indifferently as she would have wished, "He told me he was coming."

Edward was instantly struck by her manner, as he had been in the carriage.

"Did he say he would call?"

"Yes."

Then she looked aside, and rather abruptly changed the subject.

This was so different to anything he had seen at Bronwylfa, that Edward concluded his sister had some reason for being annoyed with Lord Cranford. And he felt vexed.

But she thought only of veiling her heart, into which she had had that sudden glimpse.

Manvers entered with a vase of choice flowers.

"Well, you are altered," said Margaret in a while, after having watched her brother's delight in wonder. "When I suggested that the flower-tin should be filled, mamma said they would be wasted on you. You never used to care for flowers."

"You must remember, Maggie, that for more than two months I have lived amongst a people to whom a sprig of groundsel is a glimpse of Nature, cherished as you cherish your exotics. I have not seen a garden since I came."

"Then I argue from this that we rarely know the value of our blessings until we lose them."

"I have found it so," he answered. "But there is one blessing which I have never missed—the conviction that I am in my right place."

"Oh, I am so glad to hear that, Edward." She rose, and stood by his side, looking earnestly into his face. "I thought you looked wearied when I came, and I almost feared you were disheartened." She spoke hesitatingly.

"I was only longing for you, Maggie. Don't you remember, when we were children, we always pictured me in my Rectory, and you keeping house for me? In those days, if I recollect rightly, you were never going to be married. How is it now?" he asked, wickedly.

She coloured so painfully, he forbore to tease her; but his suspicion that something peculiar had occurred was deepened.

There was a slight commotion in the street. Edward went to the window. The door was opened. Hudson looked in.

"It's' unpacked, Miss Marget," she said. "Shall we bring it?"

When Edward turned round, the servants were just placing a painting against the chairs.

"Oh, Margaret!"

"Am I not good?" she said, laughing. "I persuaded

papa to send it from the picture-gallery—knowing your extraordinary love for it."

"Love for it! Do you know, when I have sat here alone, going over, in memory, all the dear old home-rooms, and the things with which I have been familiar ever since I was born, I have thought more of this picture than of anything. The hours I stood before it, even in my boyhood! Our mother used to say it made me too grave and melancholy for a lad. I think it helped to train me, Maggie. How good of you!"

It was an exquisite picture—an artistic gem.

The subject was Ariadne on the isle of Naxos, waiting for her lover, Theseus.

The foreground was lonely shingle. The sinking sun burnished every pebble, and reddened the waves that curled lazily on the strand.

She, seated on a rock, that rose from shallow water—for the tide was on the ebb—shaded her eyes with one hand, the other lay listless upon her knee.

What agony of hope, yet what wild despair were blended in that gaze! The lips parched—white with sickening disappointment—were parted, as if she heard the far-off sound of a ploughing through the waves. The eyes, riveted on the horizon, were wells of passionate love!

"Theseus—Theseus—my beloved! Come back to me!"

These words were written on the face, in every line of that bending figure—so heedless of the glories heaven was flinging down! "Night is coming—I see no sail!" You could read it on her brow and lips. Neither tree nor shrub broke the drear desolation of the scene; it was Ariadne alone—in her despair—yet still waiting for her love. Edward looked at it long without speaking.

"Margaret," he said at last, so suddenly, that she was

startled, "do you know that I have always associated you with this picture."

She was standing beside it, with her arm resting on the frame; her own gaze had been a sad one.

"Have you?" she answered. "Why?"

"I scarcely know. One reason is, I think the face strikingly like yours; but the chief one is that I think you would love like Ariadne; and that when all hope withered, you would be content to die."

"I should," she said in a low voice. "I could not love again, if that be your meaning, Edward."

"I am sure you could not." he said; "but I hope no such fate will ever be yours."

She gave no reply.

"I suppose this is genuine Manchester weather," she said cheerfully, on entering the breakfast-room the next morning. "Two of my fellow-travellers were discussing it yesterday. One said, 'it rains every day until afternoon.' 'And then it begins again,' growled the other.

"'Then when is it fine?' asked a lazy-looking young fellow.

"'When everybody is asleep,' said the first speaker."

"I should think it was a damper on your spirits, Maggie," Edward said.

"No, it wasn't. I don't believe anything I hear, and not half I see."

"If you can only be blind and deaf sometimes in your adventures here, you'll be a gainer."

"Well, I mean to be neither this morning."

"Why?"

"I am going to see your little pew-opener, and one or two more."

"Not to-day."

"Why not? The sooner I know them, the sooner I can help you, Mr. Edward Seymour."

"But it is such a day, and pearls are not improved by washing, you know," he said laughing. "I am responsible, too, for your welfare."

But it ended by their driving off to Angel Meadow. They left the brougham at a near point, and then, under one umbrella, they entered a very narrow, dirty street. Margaret could not help shrinking back, as a coarse-looking woman suddenly flung past her a pail of filthy water.

"Poor thing!" she said, pityingly. "How difficult it must be to keep her house clean!"

"Clean!" Edward said; "it is more difficult for them to keep their souls clean, where families are crowded into each room."

They turned now into a wider street; there was a gin-palace at every corner they passed. Groups of women, with infants, some at the breast, crowded their doorways. Now and then a loud oath smote their ears, as a door would open, and some figure would reel out, knocking against an incomer. Margaret clung to Edward's arm trembling. What a contrast to Bronwylfa!

"Shall we go back?" he said. "I fear, love, this is scarcely a scene for you. Have I done wrong in bringing you?"

"Edward!" She went on with firmer step; but as the loud sounds of a quarrel were heard, she hurried him forward nervously. Only for an instant. She glanced at Edward's anxious face, and then her step was as steady, her look as firm as his own. "I am not afraid, brother," she said. And never after, during her long sojourn in Manchester, did he ever see one sign of fear or of quailing, in his noble sister.

"I must go here first," he said. Up a narrow court—too narrow for them to walk abreast—then up two flights of rickety, dark stairs. Edward groped his way. He knocked gently at a door.

"Come in," said a feeble voice, that was followed by a hollow, choking cough.

He pushed the "bob-latch." Here was Margaret's first picture of poverty.

On a low straw pallet, his back supported by a wooden stool, lay the consumptive young man whose "Aye," in Edward's first sermon, had given the key-note to that sympathy which had since been established between Edward and his people. One of his worst fits of coughing seized him as they entered.

Margaret, unused to such suffering, stood appalled. Edward raised him in his arms, wiped the perspiration from his brow, and when the paroxysm had passed, laid him down as tenderly as a mother would a babe. She gazed in astonishment at him, wondering where he had so learned these nursing ways. She came forward and held her vinaigrette to the man's nostrils. He opened his eyes, smiled feebly, and closed them again, as if his spirit were just hovering between life and death. Edward signed to Margaret to sit down; but there was no seat. She knelt by the low bed, whilst Edward, with the cold clammy hand in his, repeated from memory, in a clear, distinct voice, parts of that exquisite chapter from Isaiah.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God!"

When he came to the verse, "The voice said, Cry," the man opened his eyes, and looked earnestly on Edward. Then with solemn emphasis, he repeated after him—

"But the word of our God shall stand for ever."

"Is that word your hope?" asked Edward, bending over him.

"Sir!"

What a world of wonder in a word!

"Have you a good hope?"

"I see heaven opened," said the dying man, clasping

his wasted hands, "I shall soon have the 'rest' you told us was so sweet, sir. I'm only waiting a bit." He said this with the wistfulness of a sick but patient child.

Margaret had hidden her face. They heard her sob, and Edward looked round at her in fear for her emotion. The dying man turned his head.

"Lady," he said, "dunnot cry; the Lord is so good. I've nothing but mercies."

Nothing but mercies! She hushed her weeping and looked round on that bare garret, lighted only by a sky window, the rain dripped through the broken panes, and the air came chill. Not a chair nor table were there; no fire-place, a dry crust, a broken cup containing a little water stood on the floor, yet on the dying man's death-stricken face there was a glorious rapture, that was but the reflection of that light to which his eager soul was hasting.

The two watchers could have fancied they felt the wafting of the spirit wings—the convoy waiting to bear him to his rest. Edward prayed with him, his eyes closed drowsily. "Rest—sweet rest," he murmured. They were his last words. He seemed to fall asleep, and they stole quietly away. When Mr. Allen entered, an hour later, he found him dead.

Edward and Margaret walked on in silence until he stopped at the door of a mean cottage. He spoke in a severe tone to the woman who answered his knock. "I have been to see William Bell," he said. "I found him alone, and the articles I sent were not there."

"I had only left an hour ago," she began.

"Hush!" he said, "he told me that he had been alone since yesterday."

She began to whimper.

"Where are the pillows and the other things I sent?" he asked.

"I pawned them to get vittles for him," she said, in a whining tone.

"You know that you are speaking what is false," he said, sternly and indignantly. "Remember, you receive no pay from yesterday, and I shall demand from you those articles."

She stared at him in astonishment.

He hurried on quickly to a neighbour's, a respectable-looking woman, gave her some money, and sent her to the sick man, with instructions what to purchase.

"Edward," said his sister, "you don't mean that that woman was hired to nurse him, and has treated him so cruelly?"

"I do." A bright crimson burned in two large spots on his cheek. "She has neglected him and robbed him—a dying man! I sent bedding and furniture. You saw how destitute he was. I employed her from charity. I thought her own sufferings from poverty would teach her sympathy. I gave money to her; but it is three days since I saw him—and you heard her! It is that curse, gin."

Pale with the sickening odors round her, but, above all, distressed by what she had seen and now heard, it certainly was a relief to Margaret when they entered a cottage in a quiet bye-street, that was not a thoroughfare. Outside the door hung a bird-cage, decorated with grasses and groundsel, in which a linnet chirped and twittered, for the rain was over, and a gleam of sunshine fell through its prison bars. The cottage was very clean, the floor was newly-sanded; the plate rack was in perfect order; the three-cornered mahogany cupboard shone with rubbing, and reflected a bright fire above a tidy hearth. It was most refreshing to Bronwylfa's dainty pearl. A young woman, very fresh-looking, who might have just stepped out of a dairy, smiled as Edward entered.

"Aunt said you'd come, sir," she said, with a curtsey, "though I told her it was wet." She placed chairs for them, and went upstairs, returning in a moment to invite them up.

Margaret hesitated. "You will only see what is pleasant here," he whispered.

"It is not that," she said, quickly; "but shall I be welcome as a stranger?"

He smiled, and bade her "Come and see."

What a different room to the one they had last seen! The boards were white from constant scrubbing, a nice strip of carpet ran round the bed, that was hung with blue and white check. Over the window was a valance of the same, and there was quite an attempt at display in the cover of the dressing-table, on which was a mahogany looking-glass, garnished with brass nobs. An easy-chair, covered also with check, stood by the bed, and a little table. On that stood a very large dish of superb flowers, also a plate of fruit. They arrested Margaret's gaze. She could scarcely look at anything but those flowers.

On the bed lay a very white, small-featured little woman. She seemed something like a lily growing where you would expect to find only weeds. There was an air of refinement about her, though her language was very rustic. "Is this the lady as yo' wur spakin' on, sir? Yo're gradely welcome, miss. Shusie, put a chair for the lady. Aw'd welly gen yo up, sir, for o' aw thowt as yo would na be for brakin' yo're word; but it wur so wet, they said. Yo' hannot got wet, aw hope, sir."

"Oh, no," Edward said; "we have only walked a little distance. It is a long way from home, you know."

"Ay, it is," said Mrs. Latham. "Some one wur sayin' tother day—it wur that grumblin' Sam Crossworth —'as it wur rare an' foine of th' parson ridin' i' his carriage. Yo' known what a bad word he has for o' that's

good! He comes a sittin' wi' me neaw and then; but aw noan want him, wi' his Chartist talk. Aw telled him if th' parson had na a thing for t' ride in, mebbe there 'ud be more clemmin' folk nor there is i' th' Church, for aw did na see heaw o' th' things as he wur allus takin' to th' poor wur to be carried ony other road. Aw had na forgotten th' blankets as yo' gen him. An' then he wur wicked enough for t' say as th' Lord himsel only rode on a ass. My blood *wur* up then. Aw axed him if he'd keep hissel for hire agen th' parson wanted one, an' aw think he did na like it, for he's ne'er bin sin'."

It was quite impossible to stop the little woman when she once began to talk, and both Edward and Margaret laughed heartily, her indignation was so comic.

"Never mind him," Edward said, "he will be all right in time. I was sure to come if I promised. Besides, I wanted to know how soon we might hope to see you at church again."

"It winna be this side Christmas, sir. Aw've getten th' rheumatiz i' my j'ints that bad, aw'm feared o' bein' crippled. Aw am for sure."

"We will hope not," said Margaret, kindly. "Do you wear red flannel? Mamma says that is the best remedy. I will get you some."

Mrs. Latham turned her head quickly at the sound of Margaret's voice. That voice had a charm for everyone: it was low, yet so distinct, tender too, with many variations of tone; each one was but another note of music that sounded from a heart most womanly.

"Thank you, lady," said the invalid, fascinated by the voice, and Margaret's face. "But it's worth o' th' red flannel i' th' world to see yo', an' hear yo' spake a' thatten."

Edward smiled, his sister blushed. "You have some splendid flowers there," he said.

A bright light flashed into her eyes.

"Ay, sir, aw han; an' my Robert sent 'em. An' what's more, dun yo' know it wur by th' Earl's orders. When he heered aw wur ill, he telled my lad for t' send 'em; they come by th' train last night wi' a seet o' grapes, o' packed up i' a tin. Aw wur ne'er so o'ercome i' my life, to my thinkin'. It wur so unexpected, yo' known. An',—why, Shusie, wheer's t' letter? Ay, theer it is," she said, "Maybe yo' would na mind readin' it up, sir, though aw have heered it; but it's welly better nur Doctor's stuff to me."

The letter ran thus:—

"DEAR AND HONOURED MOTHER——"

"Hark at that!" put in Mrs. Latham, parenthetically.

"This letter leaves me purely, thank God, in health; but very distressed to hear such bad accounts of you—*very*——"

"He's gettin' a feelin' 'art," again interposed the mother. "Well, sir, go on—thank ye, kindly."

"My Lord said he was going to Manchester sooner than he thought, so I made bold to ask if it might be in a week or so; for I thought if I could let you know you would see me so soon, it would do you good——"

"He wur reet theer!" she said, eagerly.

"When the Earl knew you were ill, he said I could come to you at once; but I knew, mother, that you would rather wait a bit, than I should neglect my duty; and just now, I am wanted for *several particular reasons*." These words were underlined. "So I thanked him, and said, I would rather wait his time; and I think he was pleased, because my leaving would have been an inconvenience just now, as I am always trusted specially; and my Lord is a good deal going backwards and forwards to his houses. Then he gave orders for some grapes, and fruits, and flowers, to be

sent to you—which, my dear mother, you will soon get now, all being well. So, with my respects, and love, hoping soon to see you,—I am,

"Honoured mother,

"Your dutiful son,

"ROBERT LATHAM."

"LONGLEAT."

"N.B.—Carriage paid. The gardener says my Lord cut the roses himself."

"Now, sir, what dun' yo' think o' that? My lad wur reet. Aw would na ha' had him ill-convenienced for nothin' how-shusiver it wur."

"I am sure you have great reason to be proud of the kindness shown to you through your son, Mrs. Latham." Edward said, "He must be a good servant."

"Ay, sir, aw known that; but it is na every good sarvent as has gettin' a good mester. Aw ne'er know'd one like th' Earl."

Margaret listened, afraid to look up. She felt as if her burning cheeks would betray her eager interest. She buried her face in the flowers.

"Th' young lady's fond o' posies, I think, sir."

"She is," said her brother, with a smile.

"Tak' some on 'em, do Miss," she said. "Aw've so many, yo' see. Shusie, wheer's t' scithors for t' cut 'em. They're o' teed up."

But Miss Seymour stopped her. "I will not, indeed, take any," she said, with thanks. "Every flower is precious to you. Mind you have the stalks cut every day, and when they are fading, put a few drops of gin in the water. It will revive them."

"Well, for sure, Miss! Who'd ha' thowt as sperrits wur good for flowers. It shows as God Almighty ne'er intended it fur pison."

Margaret laughed at her logic. "It depends on the quantity," she said.

"Shusie," said Mrs. Latham, "bethink me as aw tell eawr Robert o' that gin—his Lady is so fond o' posies, and, maybe, they're scarce i' th' winter."

How delicious was the scent of those flowers to the girl bending over them! She laid her warm cheek, and tale-telling eyes against their soft leaves—their associations were even sweeter than the blossoms themselves.

Margaret scarcely heard the psalm that Edward read; and when she knelt during his prayer, her thoughts took wing to Longleat. She saw so vividly the hand gathering the roses, that she was shocked to find the blessing had been given, when she had scarcely heard a sentence.

"Do take a posy, Miss," said the sick woman, for Margaret's eyes were taking a farewell of them.

"You are so kind. I will take one flower, although it seems like robbery."

"Do," said Mrs. Latham, warmly. "There's a beautiful scarlet 'un," pointing out, by a nod, a splendid geranium.

But Miss Seymour took an opening rose-bud, that seemed loth to burst into full loveliness, it so nestled in its mossy bed.

"My Lord cut the roses," sounded in her ears, and she carried the bud tenderly, as if it were a messenger from him.

When they arrived at home, they heard of William Bell's death. Edward felt the circumstances keenly. Margaret proved a true comforter. She would not dwell on the afflictive privations of William's last hours, for which Edward unreasonably blamed himself; nor would she make light of her brother's self-reproaches. She spoke with thankfulness of this first fruit of his ministry so safely garnered; talked of his rest, and then of the joy of all the

redeemed, until he was beguiled into a long and cheering conversation upon heaven, and he could only feel intense gratitude for the sick man's entrance there.

When she went to her room, she placed the rose-bud in water. It never fully opened—it was scarcely, indeed, half-blown when it withered. It lay in Margaret's desk through long, long years, until it crumbled into dust. But the love that cherished it never withered, never died.

CHAPTER II.

DOES SHE LOVE?

Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love!
Hearts that the world in vain had tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied.
* * * * *
A something light as air—a look,
A word, unkind or wrongly taken.
Oh! love, that tempests never shook,
A breath, a word like this hath shaken,
And ruder words will soon rush in
To spread the breach that words begin.

MOORE.

EARLY one morning Helena entered the General's library, not, it must be owned, without a slight tremor at her heart. Time was hasting on, and her trousseau had not yet been ordered. Men do not think of these things, and Helena was not only motherless, but she had no intimate friend of her own sex to advise her. The moment she named the subject, however, her father said, "Let everything be suitable to your future rank, Helena."

"And to the rank of your daughter, papa," she added, proudly. The true Davenant spirit spoke there.

He turned away impatiently—he thought how different circumstances might have been, but he merely said, "In the eye of society your position as the Countess of Longleat will be very different from that of my daughter even."

Helena shrugged her shoulders. It did not appear to her that she would be elevated by her marriage. Her father would not have uttered such words save for the terrible secret that was crushing him to the earth. "Your jewels," he began.

"Oh, papa," she said, interrupting him in her impulsive way, "Elspie has been saying that she is sure the old diamonds that my"—her voice faltered—"my mother wore will want re-setting."

The General had stopped in his monotonous pacing of the long, sombre room. "Leave that to me," he said, shortly.

An indignant flush rose to Helena's cheek, and a hasty reply to her lips, but she checked herself, and, deeply hurt, she abruptly left the room.

The General was excited, yet conscious of the injustice of his irritability. The diamonds did want re-setting, but those family jewels, celebrated for their value and beauty, could never belong to his daughter. Every little incident of this kind made him feel more keenly that he was walking on the edge of a volcano. An hour after his own death the true heir might come forward and claim from the Countess of Longleat—the last of his race now—the very ornaments she had worn. He almost gnashed his teeth with rage. His means, thank heaven! were great enough to supply the loss of these entailed gems; but it was the having to do so that galled him.

In the midst of his bitter thoughts Helena entered again. "Papa," she said, "I have been consulting Elspie. I have no one else"—the loneliness of her position painfully affected her at that moment—"I am wishful to have a distinct understanding with you. Her ideas are somewhat magnificent."

"Have I not told you to order everything befitting your future rank?" he said, smiling kindly, for he had conquered his irritation now. "I have great confidence,

my dear, in your good taste, and——"—he hesitated an instant—"in your judgment in these matters."

She bit her lip, as he politely opened the door for her exit, and as it closed behind her, she stamped her foot in passion. "If there be one thing which I hate more than another," she said, apostrophizing the dark panels, "it is to be considered a model when I'm nothing of the kind! Papa knows very well I need his guiding hand. But they are all alike. If I ask Elspie, it's 'Tak' your ain mind, Miss Helena.' I can't talk to Cranford, and if I did, *he* thinks I can't do wrong. The things may go to kingdom come before I'll attend to them this day." She had spoken every word, had Miss Helena, in her vexation, aloud—any eavesdropper might have had the benefit of her confidence, a great deal she cared!

"I am going to ride, nurse," she said, crossly, as she entered the nursery; "if papa asks for me, you don't know where I am."

Elspie looked over her glasses in alarm. "What is it, my bairn?" she asked; "wha has been frettin' ye?"

"Can't I take a ride but you must think I have been fretted, nurse?"

"But were ye nae gangin' to the ceety, Miss Helena? Ye mind the carriage was ordered," she said, anxiously.

"Then let it be countermanded," Helena replied, as she went away.

Elspie took off her spectacles, and closed her Bible with a sigh. What it was that had so disturbed her nursling at such a time she could not imagine; but the contrast between Helena's mood now, and her pretty eagerness in the morning, was painful in the extreme to Elspie. "God guide her, an' be verra tender to my lone lamb," she said, wearily.

Helena summoned her maid, who looked surprised when told to bring out her habit. "Miss Davenant,"

she said, respectfully, "the carriage will be round directly."

"I know it, but I have changed my mind." Very graceful she looked in her riding-dress, for she was fast budding into womanly loveliness. "Give orders for Selim to be brought," she said; "I shall not require a groom."

Now, Helena knew that if one thing more than another would incense her father, it would be her riding alone; but she was in one of her old wilful humors, and a lonely dashing gallop was what she wanted. The only thing she feared was encountering her father before she was fairly off. She ran to the stables in time to witness the saddling of Selim himself. The beautiful animal arched his neck and pawed the ground, neighing and champing impatiently, tossing his noble head until the white foam-flakes snowed the groom, who "wo'd," and "stand-still'd" the animal in a fever of vexation, to Helena's secret amusement. She stood just as she had stood, and in very similar circumstances too, in the stable-yard of Elm Hall. She switched her little riding-whip too, as she did then, you recollect.

"Please, Miss," said the groom, respectfully, touching his cap; "this darned brute, begging your pardon, will not stand it."

In an instant, the man's words, the scene altogether in fact, brought to her recollection that memorable night at school. She laughed her merry ringing laugh.

Several of the stud-servants were about. They looked at each other and grinned—her laugh was as infectious as of old—those old days! She mounted lightly. Selim reared, and showed every graceful caper it was in the power of a most graceful horse to show; but Helena was perfect mistress of him.

"Stand aside," she said to the groom. "Now, Selim, you will have to behave yourself;" but Selim did not seem

to possess the obedient instinct. The capers went on. She gave him a sharp cut with her whip. He was on his hind legs in an instant. She repeated the lash, and presently, he stood still, panting. Then she dismounted, took the brute's head in her hands, and allowed him to smell her as he would. They were the best of friends now, and she mounted again.

Her father's own old groom respectfully asked if he should attend her; but she waived him away impatiently, and rode off. A fresh breeze was blowing; Selim sniffed the air, and bounded like a bird over low hedge and ditch—wherever his rider saw a tempting place for a springing gallop, she went, fearless of danger, and very reckless. They passed milestone after milestone. Helena did not in the least know where she was; but she still urged Selim on; and still he tossed his mane, and his hoofs seemed to spurn the ground they trod. She checked him on the top of a somewhat steep hill, to scan their whereabouts.

"This is glorious," she said, patting Selim's neck, who tossed his head and snorted his corroboration of her opinion. In the far distance she saw "Chalk-brow." How it brought back that memorable ride there! She recalled her escape that night with a shudder; and then leaning her elbow on the pummel, she sat musing, whilst Selim pulled the hedges.

Strange events had happened since then—when with her father sitting beside her in cold disdain, she had driven from Elm Hall in sad disgrace; but chiefly troubled herself, because she had a glimpse of Margaret Seymour's tearful face at a window.

"Dear Margaret!" she said, aloud, "I have been a poor friend to you, I am afraid." And then the ball; her subsequent engagement, the Earl's estrangement, and her life in Italy, all came to her mind—such a crowd of associa-

tions and incidents!—then the lay sister's face rose before her so vividly, that she started. Why had she come so? "I am very foolish," she said, to herself; "but she was a strange woman. Come, Selim," giving the bridle a shake, "this will not do. Heigh ho! I wonder how many gallops you and I can have alone when I belong to somebody! Over the hedge!"

The intelligent creature—no other word will do, for he was more than sagacious—understood her. He sprang; but, alas! the opposite bank was treacherous—it gave way partially; he could not regain his hold—down they came, fortunately, providentially rather—for it is certain Providence does overrule the merest trifles, as well as the greater incidents in our lives—she was not under Selim, and she had presence of mind to draw her foot from the stirrup as they fell. She was stunned for a moment by the suddenness of the shock; but she felt sure that she was unhurt. As she got up, the horse lifted his head to look at her: there was almost Christian intelligence in his beautiful, soft eyes. "Up, Selim," she said, taking the bridle. He kicked, and plunged, and she tugged, and helped him as she best could; but it was no easy matter to get him up even that little bank. Very thankful was she when he stood on his four legs at last, shaking though he was.

"It was only a heathery fall, my bonnie!" she said, with her arms round the creature's neck; but her white, quivering lips, showed how frightened she had been. They were both covered with dust.

"Come and be groomed, Selim," she said. The poor animal, with drooping head, as if he felt disgraced, followed her to a place where long grass grew, and then stood patient, whilst she made a wisp, and rubbed him down with it, and with her pocketHandkerchief.

"Funny curry-comb, this, beauty, is it not?" she said, laughing—her spirits rallying again. "Well, we are in a

precious mess!—I beg Mrs. Elmore's pardon—in a dilemma, Selim: that's the word, remember, for an aristocratic quadruped. Never mind, it will be all the same a hundred years hence, when my monument will be somewhere—with all my virtues and graces in a list. A mighty long one it will be, if I get my deserts! But I wonder, Selim, if they will put down, 'daring equestrienne, and skilful groom.' Fancy how it would shock all the other dead Countesses! They would rise in a body, short waists, Elizabethan ruffles, and folded hands; or flirting fans, according to the age and fashion! Wouldn't it be a sight! Ah, well, we have had our fun!"

Ah, how little she dreamed where her monument would lie!

"Now, for myself," she said, still talking to Selim, who turned his head from side to side, watching every movement of his mistress. His eyes looked sorrowful—he trembled still. It was some time before she could make her habit look even decent. Then she led the horse to a gate, mounted by it, and turned into the lonely highway. She was riding very slowly, when she saw two horsemen coming rapidly towards her—a gentleman and his servant.

"Goodness!" she said, her heart beginning to beat very rapidly. "Suppose it should prove to be papa." She looked round for a shelter; but only the low hedges were on either side, and nearer and nearer came the riders. To her great relief she saw it was not her father; but it was the Earl of Longleat, whose eyes had been fixed on this solitary lady. He dashed forward, then as suddenly reined in his steed, which was thrown on his haunches by the check.

"Helena!"

"My Lord!" This, with a mocking obeisance. His delight was great; hers was moderated by circumstances.

A beautiful flush chased her previous paleness—he looked at her with fond admiration.

"Where are you going?" he inquired. Then he looked up and down the long, straight road. "Where is your servant? You are not alone?" His eye caught her disordered habit, white in some places, which told tales. "My darling," he said, anxiously, "has anything happened? Where is the groom?"

"I am quite alone," she said, hesitating, though there was a dangerous spark of mischief in her eye. "I am making the most of my liberty, Lord Cranford."

He seemed annoyed. "Look at your habit, Helena!"

"Oh, Selim and I have been kissing the grass," she said, carelessly.

"You have not been down?"

"I am sorry to contradict you, Ernest Cecil Cranford, Earl of Longleat, Lord of Ruthven!—any more titles?" she asked, coolly, with that old wilful spirit rising just because she saw in him a disposition to control her.

"Don't jest, dearest. I am anxious. Wait one moment."

He dismounted, beckoning to the groom, who had stopped in the distance. The man held the horses whilst the Earl examined Selim.

"You will find nothing wrong," she said, with provoking nonchalance. "I groomed him well. It was a slide, and up again. The tailor will be the only party benefited; look at this rent."

"Thank God!" said Cranford, in a low voice, which thrilled her—it was so earnest. He mounted his horse. "Ride back," he said to his servant. "Miss Davenant's groom will be sufficient when he comes up. Tell Robert to be at the station this evening, in time to catch the mail at nine."

The groom galloped off.

"Helena," he said, "I didn't want that man to spread the gossip of your riding alone. Tell me, dear, how this is?" She did not answer. "Tell me, my darling."

She turned her glorious eyes upon him, and said, with a smile—

"I know no law which compels me to answer every question I am asked."

He bowed without speaking.

Her conscience reproached her instantly; but she was not in a yielding mood.

"Selim, I should like a canter," she said: they rode quickly for a few minutes; but her fall had shaken her more than she was aware. They were not far from St. Hilda's ruin, and at Helena's suggestion they went there. She was very glad to be lifted from her saddle, for she could not spring now. Very tenderly did the Earl take her in his arms, and looked down on the delicate face, so bewitching in its timid glance just now, and with unwonted emotions he exclaimed—

"Oh, my darling, my darling, I cannot be half thankful enough! I shudder to think how I might have found you."

Her lips quivered, as they had done after her fall; she raised her face, which he kissed passionately.

"Naughty child!" he said, smiling, as he saw her excitement, and wishing to still her feeling. "And so my little one was making the most of her liberty, and will not give an account of herself either!" What was the maiden's reply?

"Don't, Lord Cranford," she said, hiding her face in her hands, and then looking up, she played with his chain as usual.

"I was vexed, and wanted a lonely ride. I was only taking the hedge, when the bank slipped, and Selim fell."

"Only taking the hedge, my dear Helena! You must not risk your life in that way. But who had vexed you, darling?"

"Papa."

He frowned. "But, indeed, Lord Cranford," she added quickly, "I scarcely think I ought to have been vexed; it was only because papa would not—that is, would insist on my having my own way."

The Earl laughed outright.

"My darling child, you are the strangest little anomaly. Then that is a rock against which I must guard," he said, bending down to look into her eyes. "But, Helena, that remark scarcely accords with the hauteur of a few moments since. I thought I was in the presence of our Lady the Queen."

But Helena did not even smile.

"Cannot you understand," she said—with a feeling at her heart which she would rather not have had, a feeling that her lover might have shown a more intuitive perception of her meaning—"that there are times, especially in the life of a girl placed as I am, when guidance is more to be desired than perfect freedom; and a little authority would only be a proof of the blessing of being cared for."

"Forgive me," he said, raising her hand to his lips; but she drew it back hastily.

"This morning, my Lord, I went to papa, as other girls go to their mothers in such a case. I found him generous; but it was through his pride, not his love for me. Had I been his ward, whose property alone was under his guardianship, he could not have dismissed me more curtly or more politely. I would far rather have had one word of loving counsel, than all the munificent gifts he wished me to receive with indifference as my right."

The Earl had taken her little hat off, and he stroked

her hair that waved in the wooing wind; but gave no answer to her words.

"I began to think, my Lord," she said, sighing, that every body was conspiring to break my heart, by leaving me to stand alone. I might have been a miracle of propriety and discretion this morning to hear papa talk; but it was only to hide his want of love." She said this with sadness. "If I consult Elspie, she says, 'As ye wull, my bairn.' And you too, my Lord," she added bitterly, "you too have treated me too much like a child that could not err."

"I have no doubt you will correct that fault in me," he interposed lightly.

"Don't ridicule me, Lord Cranford," she answered; "you don't know, perhaps, what it is to go through life alone. I could envy a child that was whipped, if the chastisement were administered by a loving mother. I don't think," she said, her lip trembling and her eyes filling with tears, "that there is any passage of Scripture on which I have dwelt so fondly or so sadly as, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' I suppose it is because no one ever cared for me so much as to reprove for simple love of me."

A minute winged away in silence, then the Earl took her two hands in his—

"Listen, Helena—nay, look at me, dear. The depths of my love for you terrify even myself—who am to be your sole protector through life. You are more to me than angel—ay, even than God or Heaven. I could not exist without you. I worship you, as we worship all things beautiful; but here, on my heart, you have so stamped your image that, come what may, it can never be effaced. My belief in your purity, your truth, your goodness, is strong, because I have seen nothing in you to blame. If I have not upheld you by my strength, it was because I

failed to detect in you one sign of weakness. That you had trials, I knew; but their very source rendered it impossible for me to lay my hand as Daysman upon both. No Daysman could come betwixt you—father and daughter—and therefore, dear child, when my own heart has suffered, I have felt as if it were a nobler duty to hide it, than to allow you to see that I perceived your sorrow. I knew that a time was coming when, in your new home, you would learn to look on life as one long summer of deep joy; that there a mother's love awaited you, and a husband's devotional care. I often saw the traces of tremours that were stilled; the quivering of the lip that had been just quieted; the bathed eyes that told of tears that were spent: but, darling, I reverenced your silence—a silence I could not have broken if I had dared. I venerated your patient submission—a submission I would not have lessened if I could. I bent before your filial feeling—call it pride if you will, I call it by a holier name—a feeling that would not permit you to bring reproach, real or seeming, upon your father's name, because he was your father. If I let you lean too much upon yourself; if I deemed you so good, so pure, it was because, as I have said, I only saw you such, and I would not rob my precious little one of one atom of the veneration which her noble self-reliance in the conflict won. Wait, darling, until I can call you—oh, so proudly!—my wife! wait until then, my true-hearted love, and you will see how every tendril of your rich nature will be trained to lean on him who will swear to cherish you. The ground will be always sounded for you, my child, before you take one step. You will have no feeling of loneliness when you, my beautiful, are indeed my own!"

She hid her face, trembling. How she had wronged him! How impetuous, how impatient she had been! Was he very grieved? She looked up in a little while—

he was not at her side. He was standing amid the ruins of St. Hilda's. An archway clothed with ivy was above him; through it a beautiful glimpse of distant hills, that rose above St. Hilda's Vale, were seen—framed, as it were, by these old grey stones. The Earl was leaning on the broad seat of what was once a window, gazing intently before him, as if he were meditating on that future of which he had just spoken.

It was only for a few moments. He came to her side again. His eye was deepened in color, his cheek was pale with suppressed feeling.

"Forgive me!" said Helena; and then a great sob —so wild, so full of agony, it might have cleft her heart— burst from her lips. He could not speak; he could only caress her in mute tenderness.

"I am so sad!" she sobbed at last, most piteously.

"Are you, darling?" he said, softly.

He could give no comfort, for he felt miserable himself beyond utterance. How he had been mistaken! He had been wounding her day after day—perhaps alienating her heart from himself in the very time in which it ought to have grown to him; for was not *this* the seed-time of their love? What would he reap in the harvest of their union if now she felt that she could not look up to him? Hers, alas! had been no ordinary life. She had been reared in the midst of almost regal magnificence; and yet a pauper's child had had more real joy, perhaps, "dragged up" as Charles Lamb says, by a father and mother who loved it. And now, who could tell what fate hung over that fair girl? She had a father, whose strange history had made him—moulded him—into such a character as he (Lord Cranford) had never read of in the wildest romance.

He was a powerful combination of good and evil. It seemed as if the good and generous impulses in him were ever cropping up from a naturally rich heart-soil—only to

be blighted or cut down by this ever-blowing east wind of a disappointed love, that had had life once, and, therefore, never could be destroyed. It had affected his relations with his child. How much she had borne! She had the finest spirit he had ever met with—daring, impetuous, beautiful, loving—yet what patience she had shown! And he had never, by word or sign, aided her—never counselled.

Why? Because, as he had said, there could be no Daysman betwixt them, that he should lay his hand upon both. And it had all been a mistake on his part. He read that in her simple words, spoken so artlessly—

"Forgive me, Lord Cranford."

"Dear child," he said, kissing her brow, "rather let me ask you to forgive me for my selfish indifference."

"Oh, no," she said, in her pretty, pleading way. "It was I who did not understand it all."

Not understand it! That was so like her sweet unselfish character!

"You look so tired, Helena," he said, leading her to the ruined chapel.

They sat down, each full of thought, to the exclusion of words. Her sigh roused him.

"This was the altar once, Helena. Hundreds of years ago, the censer swung above where we are sitting, and priests gave their benedictions to the praying nuns. Many a vow was uttered that perhaps was never paid; and now priest and people have passed away. How mutable is this life! Nothing but this ruin to tell us they once lived. And so, dearest, the time will come when we too shall have become as they are now. I wonder how the story of our lives will read when ended? But here," rising and laying his hand upon the altar, "here—with perhaps all St. Hilda's shades hovering over us—I vow to make your life as happy, as peaceful—yea, as full of earnestness, as it is in the power of man who has to die."

I might be only the wind that swept through the aisles which once echoed to the anthem and the prayer, but now lay open to the sky, and sheltered bats and owls within their crannies and their shades: it might be only the wind that played a mournful wail amid the trees, and swung the ivy to and fro, but it was so like a sound not earthly, that it seemed to be a spirit-voice repeating again, and yet again, Lord Cranford's words: "Has to die! has to die!"

Helena rose. "Let us go," she said. The Earl had caught the impression, and he too was glad to leave.

They walked through the rank grass and nettles to their horses browsing near. Helena complained of her side as she mounted; he took the alarm instantly, and hurried the animals on.

They met the General on the highway, and he looked astounded to see Helena there. "My dear, I thought you were engaged elsewhere," he said.

"No papa. I changed my intention."

"Miss Davenant is not well," said the Earl; "her horse has been down. I hope there is no mischief done, but I fear she is bruised."

"Ride off to the village, and bring McConnel," said the General to his servant. "Are you in much pain, Helena?"

"No, papa." But her occasional contracted brows told a different tale.

As if conscious of her suffering, Selim trod carefully, avoiding the rough parts of the lane. "I am sure he knows, papa," Helena said; "watch him how gently he treads." It was pretty to see it. Very long did it seem before those weary miles were ended, for she could not canter, and there was no house where she could stay until a carriage came. How thankful she was to be lifted down!

"My own love!" She heard the whisper, and smiled faintly.

"The path of duty is the path of safety," said the General. "You ought to have been elsewhere, Helena."

"This is scarcely the time in which to remind her of that, sir," said the Earl, shortly. And then Helena went to her room. Before the doctor arrived she had fallen into a deep sleep.

"How long has this lasted?" he inquired, when he bent over her.

"Four hours, sir," said the maid.

Her breathing was so quiet he stooped to listen.

"And as tranquilly?"

"No, sir, she has tossed a great deal, and talked in her sleep."

"Did she complain of any pain?"

"Yes, sir; her side is badly bruised."

"Humph!"

"Shall I wake her, sir?"

"Wake her, my good woman! what the dickens must you wake her for? Do you think I am so in love with work that I cannot rest a bit?"

The maid sat down by the bed. The doctor took up a book until Helena's voice roused him. He went to her; she looked at him in surprise. Her eyes were lovely, so dark, and so dilated by sleep.

"Well, little lady," he said, "and how did you manage to fall from your horse?"

"Ah, I recollect," she said.

"Glad you could forget it, even for a time," he answered, lightly. "You have been sleeping like a baby, though. No bone-setting wanted here," as he carefully examined her limbs. "Now for this bruise." It was a bad one, certainly, but only a bruise, fortunately, for which he ordered fomentations. "You can be dressed lightly,

and carried to your bird's nest yonder, if you like," the doctor said, with a smile; "then, I suppose, the mate may bear you company." Helena blushed so beautifully that he was tempted to tease her again, but refrained. He went down to the General, who was anxiously waiting, with Lord Cranford, to hear his opinion. "So far as I can judge there is no serious damage done; but I can tell better when I have seen Miss Davenant up for a while."

"General Davenant," said the Earl, "I should not like to leave Calton this evening. I was going to Manchester, but if I may intrude upon your kindness, I should like some one to meet my servant at the station at nine."

"I shall feel honoured by your remaining, Lord Cranford," said the General, courteously. "Will you write your directions to your man? He had better come to you for the night."

When Dr. McConnel was summoned to Helena, he found her pale, and suffering a little; but, after watching her walk across the room, he felt satisfied that the spine was all right. "No harm done, my little lady," he said, very cheerfully. "There is a gentleman below who is somewhat impatient. May he come?" He had almost carried her to the couch; his manner was very gentle and kind. She looked at him gratefully. "But I must have you wear roses, not lilies. Drink this."

She took the contents of the glass, and pulled a very wry face; but it put fresh life into her.

Lord Cranford paused on the threshold of that room: to him it was almost sacred ground. The last beams of the setting sun streamed through the window, burnished Helena's harp, gave bright tints to a basket of flowers, laid a ray of gold across a beautiful water-color, in which some children with naked feet waded in a stream that ran through a wood, whilst their father, a wood-cutter, stood in the distance with his dog watching them—his

bairns, you could see by his face; they laid a golden hand upon Helena's head, as she rested on her cushions with a quiet, dreamy expression in her eyes, and with listless, folded hands. Very lovely in her lover's eyes she was; but her gravity pained him. He thought he should never lose the remembrance of her words: "I am so sad." She heard his step, and raised her head. Joy flashed from her eyes when he stooped to kiss her forehead, thrilled to his heart's core by that sudden, brilliant smile.

"Are you in much pain, my darling?"

"Not much, Cranford. Dr. McConnel says, it will be nothing but soreness. I can bear that. Besides, I brought it upon myself, you know. I ought to have been elsewhere."

"Never mind that," he answered, lightly. "Very soon you will have lost your chance of playing such freaks, you know."

She colored deeply, and turned away from his ardent gaze; but she took his hand, and laying it under her cheek, rested so, with a happy sigh.

"Are you going soon, Cranford?" she asked, in a little while.

"No, dear, I shall remain to-night, and, indeed, I shall not leave until you are better."

"Oh, I am so glad."

"Are you, really?"

His eargerness surprised her.

"Do you doubt it?" she said, wonderingly.

He smiled, and hesitated before he spoke. "It is seldom, my darling, that I hear a *voluntary* sweet word. And you were 'so sad' a little while ago."

She raised her beautiful eyes to his face, with a look of unwonted tenderness. "Ah, I left my sadness on the altar, where you left your vow."

"Dear child!"

There was always such a fulness of meaning in that expression of Cranford's. He talked to her of Switzerland, of Venice, and of other foreign lands in which he had travelled, to beguile her thoughts from pain. "We will go to all those places, some day," he said; "but first, we will thoroughly know our own land. We have scenery to compare with any in the world, *I* think—scenes which, as Byron says, have made me 'drunk with beauty.' There is a sweet little cot, among the Westmoreland hills, which is waiting for a visit from its Countess. I long to take her there."

"Is it yours?" she asked, after a moment of surprise.

"It is my favourite rustic home. There I am free from all restraint—all the trammels of etiquette, and fashion, and rank."

"I hate etiquette," she said, nestling contentedly, and closer to him.

"I believe you do," he answered, laughing; "but still, my darling, there will be many times when you will have to think of its requirements."

She gave her shoulder an impatient shrug.

"Then there is Ireland—the land I love!—the 'Glen of Oaks,' and the 'Golden Spears,' will satisfy even your enthusiasm, my child; and to visit the 'Seven Churches,' in the shadowy evening, will gratify that little spice of romance which, I verily believe, leads you into your acts of daring. I love, for one great reason, the land of the dark-haired Celt."

"For what reason?"

"You will know some day," he said. "I went with one I love there. But first we go to Ruthven."

She shrank back. Any allusion to their approaching marriage distressed her; but starting up suddenly, forgetting her bruised side, which, however, reminded her of its weakness, she said, "Ruthven! Have you seen

or heard anything of Bronwylfa—Margaret Seymour's home?"

"Yes, I have seen much of her," he replied, avoiding her eye—why, he scarcely knew.

"You never told me."

"Was it necessary?"

"No; but she was my old friend. And, do you know, Cranford, I have sometimes thought you would have loved her more than you will love me."

His mother's liking for Margaret; his own communication to Miss Seymour, in reference to Helena, flashed across his mind. It annoyed him; he said, seriously, "Helena, I never loved any one but you."

"Oh."

"That inimitable 'Oh!'" He laughed, and said he should know her anywhere by it.

She had noticed his annoyance, but made no remark.

She lay wakeful the greater part of that night, thinking over the events of the day. This conversation came to her mind again and again. She attributed Lord Cranford's manner to his extreme delicacy, which might have been offended by the allusion to Margaret and himself.

"Dear me," she said, aloud, "I am often doing or saying something wrong!" Then, in a little while, she said, again, "I *shall* like that cottage in Westmoreland; but not Ruthven. I don't think I should like to live long by the sea; it makes me melancholy—as if it were——"

She spoke drowsily. Her maid, whose presence she had forgotten, thought she rambled, and rose from her seat behind the curtain to look at her young mistress; but even by then Helena had fallen asleep—the woman thought she had been dreaming. Helena slept peacefully through the rest of the night, though a gale swept over the hall, and every window shook in the storm. A loud roaring was heard in the trees—tossed as the waves were tossed on

Ruthven's shore. The General and Cranford met in a corridor; both were going down, for they could not sleep. Servants were up too. No one in the household slept, excepting the sick girl, who had been wearied by her pain.

"What a sudden storm, my Lord! *I* never remember such an one. I pity those at sea. I——"

They had opened the shutters in that now ghostly-looking library, and were looking out on the park. Clouds drifted swiftly, a frightened-looking moon peeped forth now and then. They both exclaimed as an immense old oak came down with a crash.

"I would rather any had gone," said the General.

As that tree fell, a ship struck on the rocks below Ruthven. A few fishermen, with livid faces, watched the wreck they could not save. When morning came, the sun shone down upon a shuddering sea, and upon a few floating spars—the only relics of that vessel.

The news was sent to the Earl, who at once fitted out a life-boat; he never ceased to blame himself for not having done this earlier. The day came, when he was thankful for that storm which had induced him to have the "Helena" built.

CHAPTER III.

GLEN ROSS.

. . . . Look awhile upon a picture there.
'Tis of a lady in her earliest youth,
The very last of that illustrious race,
Done by Zampieri—but by whom I care not.
He who observes it ere he passes on,
Gazes his fill, and comes and comes again,
That he may call it up when far away.
She sits, inclining forward as to speak,
Her lips half open, and her finger up,
As though she said, "Beware!"
. . . . . her face,
So lovely, yet so arch, so full of mirth,
The overflowings of an innocent heart—
It haunts me still, though many a year has fled
Like some wild melody.

GINEVRA.

ONE morning, about a fortnight after Helena's accident, Margaret was sitting cosily before a bright little fire in the breakfast-room, when Edward entered.

"I never so appreciated mamma's thought for us in sending Hudson," she said, "an old servant knows one's fancies so well."

It was one of Margaret's fancies to have a fire in summer on a gloomy day; and she was quite right. It is pleasant, too, in a climate like ours, to possess one room not too fine to be cosy in.

"Have the letters come?" Edward asked.

"No, your Reverence;" but as she spoke the postman's rap was heard, and a letter bearing the Ruthven postmark was brought in. It was from Clara, who was still at the Castle, and was in ecstasies with her life there. Margaret read the letter more than once; it so absorbed her attention that she did not notice the amused look with which Edward was watching her.

The entrance of a servant with breakfast aroused her.

"Is there anything of interest in your letter?" he inquired.

"The Earl has presented Clara with an Arabian pony, as a birthday gift. And—and—but read for yourself, Edward," she said, handing him the letter.

"I should infer from Clara's remarks about the alterations that are going on at Ruthven and elsewhere, that Lord Cranford is about to be married," said Edward.

"Married! oh, no!"

Margaret's startled tone surprised Edward.

"Why not?" he asked.

She colored.

"I only thought we should have heard of it," she said, and then quickly changed the topic; but her brother could not fail to see her confusion.

"What are you going to do with yourself this morning?" he asked, before leaving home for his usual round of pastoral visits.

"Oh, I have a hundred things to do—Mozart to practise, letters to write, a water-color to finish. I am thankful for once for a wet day, even in Manchester."

"Don't fail to meet me at one o'clock, in the Exchange Rooms. You have not forgotten the paintings?"

"I will be there," she said. And then she was left alone. As she sat before the fire, her thoughts were intent on that chance remark of Edward's about the Earl's

marriage. "It cannot be so," she said aloud. The words were on her lips, when the door was opened, and the Earl of Longleat himself was announced.

For a moment she was too much astonished to speak. He laughed gaily as he took her hand. Then she recovered her self-possession.

"I was just thinking of you," she said.

"Were you? You did me great honour."

"I had a letter from Clara this morning," she added, with a smile.

"Ah! cause and effect. Well, and ow do you like life in Manchester? Have you been well and happy?"

"Quite so."

Margaret's eyes were sparkling, and a delicate flush had risen to her cheek. The Earl spoke in the tone and with the manner of one who had the right to ask after her welfare; and Margaret's heart thrilled with happiness. It was nothing more on his part than the friendly interest which he felt in the whole family, perhaps also the result of his happiness in his approaching marriage. The influence of Helena upon him was so great, that he could only be gentle to all her sex; but to Margaret, her former friend, his own confidante in the time of his misery, how could he be other than very tender? Had he been free from love-ties, it is doubtful if he would have dreamed of the possibility of her loving him, or of loving her himself; she was so different from all other girls—unspeakably different from his own darling—he so reverenced her that he almost looked up to her.

They were conversing about Edward, and his church, when a servant entered to ask at what hour she would require the carriage.

"Not now," she said.

"Don't allow me to interfere with any engagement,

Miss Seymour, for I must return immediately to my hotel."

"Must you, really?" she said; "then we will have luncheon at once, and the brougham will be at your service."

"I will accept a seat if you are going out," he said.

Very much did he enjoy that hour's talk with his hostess, although his mind was a good deal troubled to know how he could gracefully bring on the subject of his marriage. No opportunity had occurred when Margaret went up to dress.

Just as they were leaving the drawing-room, Cranford stopped her a moment; it was only to arrange her shawl, which his quick eye had noticed was pulled a little awry She looked up into his face, as she thanked him, and was met by his smile. Such a smile as Cranford's is not seen every day.

He was about to tell her of his coming marriage, when the carriage stopped, and Edward got in. His astonishment on seeing the Earl amused them both.

"Where have you sprung from, my Lord?"

"From Calton," said Cranford, rather eagerly; but the name was unknown to Edward, and Margaret did not catch it. To her, it was as familiar as Bronwylfa. They persuaded Lord Cranford to accompany them to the Exchange Rooms, and stopped at the Queen's for his letters.

He returned in a moment.

"There are none," he said; "and my man is off to his mother's."

"She is one of my people," said Edward. "I assure you I have heard your praises since I came to Manchester."

"I daresay," said Cranford, carelessly; "the old body has a most singular fancy for me."

"Very singular," said Margaret, drily. Her eyes

were sparkling with mischief, as the Earl looked at her hastily.

"Your sister has a spice of fun in her, Mr. Edward."

"Occasionally," he said. "I don't know what I should do without her in wet weather."

They both laughed heartily. "Oh, Edward," she said, "what a strange remark."

"Is it?" he said; "that is all you know about it, Miss Margaret. Any one can be a cheerful companion in sunny weather; but there are very few either so unaffected by skiey influences, or so unselfish as to be that when—

> 'The day is cold, and dark, and dreary,
> And the wind is never weary.'

It is because you always seem to me to be most brilliant when the sun does not shine, that I said that."

Margaret leaned back, and looked at her brother with a most appreciating smile.

"If I might, I should add a compliment," began the Earl.

"Don't," she said, quickly. "They are the false colors under which the pirates of society sail."

"But were not your brother's words high tribute?"

"Ah, it was, Edward." The very tone was enough. Cranford thought he had never seen a love so beautiful as theirs.

"And I would not be false to you," he said in a low tone, as the carriage stopped in Exchange Street.

She walked up the steps, and into the room of paintings, with the words sounding in her ears. It does so happen in a cross purpose game. One has a Barmecide feast on the sight of mere husks. Ah, if the Fates would only crack them! but then there would be no cross-game. As they entered the room, their attention was instantly arrested

by a female head in an oval frame, directly opposite to the door.

"That is Helena Davenant!" exclaimed Margaret.

"Then she is marvellously beautiful," said Edward.

Cranford's eyes were riveted upon it in astonishment too great for speech, but in a moment he recovered himself. "It is her likeness," he said. "How did it get here?"

Edward looked at the catalogue. "Female Head, by an Italian artist." "I have not met with the name before."

"Then it was taken in Italy. Pardon me a moment."

He went up to a young man who was seated at a table in the centre of the room, which was rapidly filling with visitors.

"Are these pictures for sale?" he asked.

"They are, sir."

"Is that one?" pointing to the head.

"It was, sir, but a gentleman purchased it half an hour ago."

"Can you tell me if it is a portrait?"

"I believe it is, sir. In fact, I know it is. The artist is a young man; he has been studying in Rome, and he copied this from one taken by his master. He would not part with it; but he is in need. I understood him to say it was the portrait of an English lady, residing in Rome. I am not certain that the lady herself would approve of the sale; but with that I have nothing to do. I merely undertake the business arrangements of this exhibition, which has been got up by artists alone. The picture has attracted great admiration this morning. It is singularly beautiful."

"Would the purchaser be disposed to let me have it?"

"I cannot say, sir. His name and address are here," referring to his book—"Mr. Glen Ross."

"Glen Ross!"

The man looked up in surprise. "Yes, sir—there he is, the gentleman himself."

The Earl walked up to him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder—"Ross!"

The gentleman turned round hastily. "Longleat! my dear fellow, where in the name of wonders have you dropped from? What a god-send!"

"It is," said Cranford, taking off his hat, and standing with it in his hand, as if the atmosphere of surprise were heavy.

"Come along here, old fellow," said Mr. Ross passing his arm through Cranford's. "It's a quiet corner—sure to be where real gems are. Well, I've never been so delighted since we dodged old Burnet at Oxford."

They both laughed at the recollection of a college escapade. It was amusing to mark the contrast between the Earl's quiet manner and his companion's exuberant excitement, although you could see there was an equal amount of feeling in each. "I say, Longleat, but you are a handsome fellow."

"Am I?" laughed the Earl, running his fingers through his hair. "You are not amiss, Glen."

In truth, they were a striking pair; handsome, and distinguished enough to attract many a second glance from passers-by.

"Well, and what have you been doing with yourself, old friend? I haven't heard a word of you for so long."

"More shame for you," said Glen, nursing his leg as carelessly as if they had been alone. "I wrote ages ago; but there never was such a lazy fellow as you. I dare swear you haven't written a letter since I saw you. What am I doing? I have been travelling. Now, I am going in for the Parliamentary dodge—getting my name up—I mean my speech-powers at meetings, and so on. And you, Longleat! Married?"

Lord Cranford smiled, and shook his head, "Going to be."

"The deuce you are! And who is the fortunate fair?"

"A Miss Davenant," he said, in a low voice; "daughter of General Davenant."

"A bit of military, eh? I always thought you had a fancy in that line. Rich?"

"Very."

"Pretty?"

"Exceedingly beautiful."

The Earl's eyes flashed.

"By Jove, but you're in luck, though you are a Lord. But, talk of beauty—come here. That's the girl I would die for! You cannot match that, Longleat!"

"Cannot I?" said Cranford, very much amused. "At least my bride-elect pleases me as well."

"Just so. That's because you are very far gone. *I* shall never be satisfied with less than that."

"Then I am afraid, my dear Ross, you will never get it."

"Perhaps not; for such a 'human face divine' I never saw. Look at that mouth! Were lips ever gifted with such sweetness? 'But her eyes!' I am thinking of fair Portia, you see. How the fellow painted them, I can't imagine. And, poor fellow! he is half dead of consumption, too. There seems to be no doubt that it is a portrait, but it must be idealized."

In simple fact, the artist had not done Helena justice. Indeed, it was impossible, with her varying expressions.

Cranford was in a mischievous humour, and he suddenly resolved not to tell his friend whom the original was.

"Will you sell it to me?"

"Sell it! My dear fellow, it's the core of my heart.

I shall go round the world with it, seeking the substance of this most beautiful shadow."

"I should like a copy."

"No, no, Longleat. I have an impression that I shall meet with my divinity."

"Perhaps you may," said the Earl, laughing as he pictured to himself what Glen's surprise would be when he saw Helena—*his wife!* "He will give it to me then," thought the Earl.

The thought that any other man possessed it would have been a great annoyance to him; but he loved Glen as he loved his own soul, and it was rather a pleasure to him that he had the picture. It was an introduction to Helena—nothing more.

"I wonder who that is with the Earl," said Edward to his sister, who had felt very strangely since Cranford's last words and evident emotion.

Just then the Earl remembered the Seymours.

"There is a splendid girl," said Mr. Ross, pausing in his whirlwind of talk.

"I should like to honor you by an introduction, if the lady will permit me."

"Ah! Your divinity, eh?"

"No, Ross. Hush!"

The two friends leisurely threaded their way through the crowd.

"Miss Seymour," he said, "may I introduce to you my oldest and dearest friend? We have met most unexpectedly."

As Margaret bowed, the thought passed through her mind, "How true it is that opposites meet in friendship."

The Earl, manly-looking, though so fair; with the deep blue eyes and auburn hair of the Saxon race; his features delicately moulded; his beard a golden brown—wavy as

the locks that graced his broad white brow: one of Nature's own gentlemen, not indebted to his coronet for the nobility which was stamped on every feature, and traceable in every line.

Mr. Ross was a true Celt; swarthy as an Egyptian, with the clearest olive tint; his features strongly marked and perfectly chiselled; his eyes dark and penetrating, with an expression that seemed to combine the fierceness and the grand repose of the eagle's; his hair of almost purple blackness, hung in heavy masses on either side his face, and even swept down upon his shoulders as if to indicate the richness of his natural gifts; his beard was long, and soft as a Turk's or Rabbi's. There was a power in his face that was worth all the other endowments with which God had gifted him.

Margaret's eye turned from one to the other in admiration that was not expressed, however, in her maidenly and modest gaze.

Always reserved with strangers, Mr. Ross's acknowledgment of the introduction was slight, though courtly. Lord Cranford offered his arm to Margaret. Mr. Ross walked beside her in silence.

This annoyed the Earl. He wanted his friend to shine before her and Edward. He was fidgety.

"Ross," he said at last, "you are the same queer fellow you ever were."

"How so, Longleat?"

Margaret, turning to him, thought what a marvellous effect Mr. Ross's smile had; it was his soul illuminating his face.

"You change so. Five minutes since you were talking me to death; now you are exhausted, I presume."

The Earl knew his friend's peculiarity, but it was scarcely fair to allude to it.

For a moment Mr. Ross looked confused; but, rally-

ing his forces, he said, with an inclination towards the lady, "I was silent, Longleat, because I was thinking of an old line—

'She moved a goddess, and she looked a queen.'

The presence brought it back to me."

Margaret coloured, and drew up her head so haughtily that the line was even more applicable; but Mr. Ross did not notice her displeasure.

"Is not that a beautiful face?" he said, stopping before Helena's portrait.

"I know——" she began.

The Earl involuntarily pressed her hand. She looked up in surprise. He smiled, and said something about the beauty of the picture. When he had the chance, he whispered—

"Pardon me. I have a reason for not wishing my friend to know that this is Miss Davenant."

There was a feeling in Margaret's heart that almost amounted to joy. It was natural to think that had the Earl been engaged to Helena, he would scarcely have wished to keep the secret from his oldest and dearest friend.

"I say, Longleat, is this the future Countess?" Mr. Ross asked, when they had strolled on together a little.

"Indeed, no, Glen."

"Well, she is a splendid specimen of queenly womanhood. I don't know how you have escaped."

"I do. I was pre-occupied."

"Ah, that is my case now. The shadow of my fate is there," pointing to Helena's portrait.

"Many a true word is spoken in jest," thought the Earl, and somehow the words jarred upon his nerves; but the next instant he was smiling at the idea of what

Glen's feeling would be when introduced to his imaginary fate.

"I must leave you now, Longleat," Mr. Ross said, looking at his watch. "I have a Committee-meeting in half-an-hour, and must first drive up to the 'Queen.'"

"My rooms are there; so I propose we dine together at eight."

"As you will."

They were separating, when Edward came up with Margaret.

"Lord Cranford," he said, in his quietly cordial manner, "can you not persuade your friend to join us at dinner this evening. I cannot forego the pleasure of having you as my guest."

Mr. Ross looked at the Earl.

"Thanks, Mr. Seymour," he said, "but——"

"Never mind buts, old fellow," said the Earl. "I can promise you such a home-evening as you—roving bachelor as you are—seldom enjoy."

Mr. Ross laughed.

"I will come, Mr. Seymour," he said, heartily, and, raising his hat, walked away.

They were all looking at him.

"I am so glad I happened to come here," said the Earl to Margaret. "Among the many happy results of my knowing you, this chance-meeting with my friend is by no means the least."

A long time after that day, both Margaret and Edward thought of that first meeting, and of the love of those two friends—a time when she was so crushed, that she almost prayed Heaven to avenge the misery that had come upon them all. Ah! many a prayer breathed in agony is left unanswered—dropped like withered leaves by Mercy's hand.

It was after the appointed hour when the Earl and Mr. Ross entered the drawing-room.

"Miss Seymour," said the former, "you must blame my friend's eloquence for this delay. He is fond of talking, and people like to listen to him. I fear, however, that we have committed an unpardonable offence."

"Lord Cranford has not stated the whole truth," said Mr. Ross. And now, for the first time, Margaret heard his rich, full, sonorous voice. "It was probable that the meeting would be adjourned, and I had to talk a little longer to prevent that, as I must leave for London to-night."

"I will pardon Mr. Ross willingly, if he will grant the same indulgence to the spoiled fish," she answered.

But there was nothing to pardon in the exquisitely-served dinner, around which there was such an air of refinement, from the flowers on the table to the noiseless attendance, that Mr. Ross even, whose perceptions were so keen and fastidious, was more than satisfied.

"What has been the object of your meeting?" inquired Edward, in a lull of converse.

"The Education movement, Mr. Seymour."

"Ah! I am glad. We need that in Manchester. What is proposed?"

"National schools in the town and surrounding districts. I have been interested in the scheme for some time past. The contrast, which, in this matter, Germany and Scotland present to England and to Ireland, has often humiliated me."

"Do you consider it essential to educate the lower classes?" said Cranford.

"I do. Educate *them*, and you raise the nation. There is no other way of doing it. Aid the development of each child's faculties; awaken his susceptibilities, his dormant inclinations for the beautiful; create in him an apprecia-

tion of the truly noble, the really good; and you conduct the whole people—the State—to the condition of a vast community, governed—nay, actuated—by the laws of harmony and order. This, I think, was the substance of Aristotle's teaching; and I confess, as the world has grown older, it has known no higher philosophy than that taught by the great intellect of Plato's school."

Mr. Ross drew nearer to him a small vase of flowers, and seemed as intent upon examining their various tints, and inhaling their odors, as he had been earnest in his words.

"You like flowers, Mr. Ross?"

"I do, Miss Seymour. I have always my rooms filled with them when at home. Their pure companionship does me good."

She wondered where his home was.

The Earl, toying with his grapes, looked up.

"Glen, what is to become of our servants? We shall have none."

Mr. Ross smiled.

"No machines, Longleat; only intelligent 'helps.'"

"Borrowing from the Republican vocabulary, eh?"

Mr. Ross shrugged his shoulders.

"What a bugbear that word 'Republic' is to you Aristocrats."

They all laughed.

"Are you a Radical, Mr. Ross?" asked Edward.

Mr. Ross hesitated before he answered.

"If to wish to sweep down, like cobwebs, all abuses that stop the march of Progress; to raise the moral, the mental, the social condition of our working-classes; to cast aside as worthless the redundant red-tapeism of our Public Offices; to seek the universal emancipation of trade and industry; and to overcome all obstacles which obstruct the progress of nations in the path of humanity—if to wish and to seek

all this is to be a Radical, I *am* one, Mr. Seymour. I go in for every wicked thing under the sun. We have now a cheap loaf; let us have a national system of free and secular education, the franchise for every man, a national foreign policy, and the reduction of our taxes by less expenditure upon our army and navy."

"For the Church—disunion with the State ("Hear! hear!" said Edward, to Ross's great surprise); fewer half-starved curates; fewer over-paid Bishops;—all sects equal, all *recognized* as such—differing only in name. I am afraid I *am* a Radical, Mr. Seymour."

"Then, what for the Aristocrats?" asked Cranford, good-humouredly.

The two friends, sitting opposite, looked at each other laughingly.

"Well, Longleat, being a Lord, you don't often hear a bit of wholesome truth——more enlightenment!"

They laughed heartily.

"But, Ross," said the Earl, "will not this scheme of yours involve us in vast expenses?"

"Would you rather pay for a prison, or for a school, sir? I confess *I* would rather buy books than fetters—pay for a teacher than a gaoler."

"So would I. But education will not prevent crime."

"Pardon me—it will lessen it. Of this fact Germany is a proof. Crime there is not common. In early life the children are disciplined—trained to love what is intellectual. The result is, that Germany is the land of thought (often misty, I must acknowledge; but a *thinking* man is rarely a depraved one). There is no system, Miss Seymour," turning to his intently-listening hostess, "so beautiful as that of the 'Kinder Garten.' It is worthy all praise. It leaves no faculty, either of body or mind, undeveloped, no muscle, even," he said, smiling. "I wondered at the strength of a little fellow educated there, until I went to see

the method; and I was charmed to observe how gently, but how perfectly, those children were led to exercise every gift, every power they possessed. One little cherub of five moulded for me, in clay, a bunch of grapes; another, a nest, with the sitting-bird; another, a 'King Charley's' head, with wonderful similitude. Begin with the child thus, and you may hope to end with a true man. There is no time left for the weeds to grow."

"My dear fellow," said Cranford, "I was not prepared to find you emerged from the chrysalis of quiet, hard-working, earnest College 'Bishop' (we called him that at Oxford, Miss Seymour—he had such a wise head) into a popular orator and man of the people."

"Excuse me, Longleat," said his friend, in rather a contemptuous tone, and looking very earnestly at Ariadne on the wall. "I do not claim any title—much less that one, which I thoroughly detest."

"Why?" they all said, involuntarily and simultaneously.

"Because, Miss Seymour," he said, gently, as Glen Ross ever spoke to woman, "because the very term, in my humble opinion, is expressive of contempt for those whom it professes to aid. I, your brother, the Earl—we are *all* really of the people. God made of one flesh all the families of the earth. Who hath made us to differ? If we are stewards over a larger amount of property, we are none the less brethren. How Death brings to one level the pauper and the king! And then, when that last enemy is destroyed, we shall all be *one* family in Heaven——"

"If saved," said Edward, kindly and genially, as he always spoke on religious subjects.

Mr. Ross bowed assentingly.

"Therefore I think, if we rightly feel our responsibility, we shall not try to pass for patrons. We are all units in a great whole. The strong are bound to help the weak.

And I do object, Longleat, to a title which seems to me to be a sort of bar between the defender and the defended."

"This is rare delicacy, Mr. Ross," said Edward.

"Don Quixotic," said Cranford, whose patrician blood flowed languidly, though his affections were warm, and his pride never verged beyond good breeding.

"Perhaps so, Longleat. But I do hate the term, 'Man of the People,' as I hate that of 'religious tolerance,' which is nothing more nor less than real bondage. It is not liberty. I never hear it without thinking that I hear also the souls of all my fellows crying out, like Paul, before his tyrants, 'I was free-born.'"

They all smiled at his flashing eyes and indignant earnestness.

"What do you think of Italy, Mr. Ross," said Margaret, "as contrasted with Germany? It has produced poets."

"It has, Miss Seymour; but if it had produced only one poet, the glory would have been great enough. In Dante, as in Homer, and in our own Shakespeare, there flows the intellectual life-blood of a nation. And, by the way, how gloriously Dante has prophesied of the salvation of Italy, and, at the same time, sketched, with a few master-strokes, the character of her saviour."

"You mean Garibaldi?"

"Yes, Garibaldi. Do you not remember the lines—

> 'He will not life support
> By earth nor its base metals, but by love,
> Wisdom, and virtue.'"

"Is it not strange," said Margaret, thoughtfully, "that Dante has had no successor in Italy? Yet Italy is the land of song."

"Ah, Miss Seymour! it is possible to sing snatches of ng with a broken heart; but the life-blood of a nation

must throb in its poetry. Italy lacks vital power. I found there on every ruin, on the steps of every deserted palace, an Improvisatore chanting the Ichabod of his land; but the *dolce far niente* spirit had passed into the heart of the people. I saw there how low a nation might be trodden beneath a despot's hoof, when that nation had itself forgotten the sacred divinity of its rights."

"In the meantime we will drink to the resurrection of Italy," said Edward. "Italy and Garibaldi" were at that time the toast in every English household.

They drank in silence, which was broken by Mr. Ross.

"Italy," he said, sadly, "lies in the sepulchre of nations whose glory has departed. This is not the age of miracles. I fear there is no spirit to breathe life into the dead."

Years have passed since then. The thrill of life has run through that land; the saviour of Italy has arisen; the tyrant has been driven from the garden of the world. And now we wait with bated breath for that day when the bayonet of the Gaul shall no longer glisten round the Vatican; when the Pontiff himself shall be uncrowned; and the dream of Dante shall be fulfilled by the substitution of a secular for a spiritual authority in the City of the Seven Hills.

Mr. Ross's eyes had been fixed on Ariadne, Margaret noticed. She asked if he were fond of paintings?

"I am," he said; "and this is a gem."

Lord Cranford rose to look at it.

"Ah, Ariadne, I suppose, Miss Seymour?"

She smiled, and, as Mr. Ross looked at her, he thought her quite as fair a picture. Excitement had faintly flushed her cheeks; her dark eyes had for a moment an expression which startled him. She was looking at the Earl, who was studying the painting. By an

intuitive flash, Mr. Ross saw something of that secret love which she had guarded so well.

"Do you consider this a true representation of woman's faithfulness, Miss Seymour?" Lord Cranford asked.

"I can scarcely say," she answered, with a blush.

"Being heart-whole, Maggie," Edward said, laughingly.

She rose without replying; and, immediately afterwards, the brougham came round to take Mr. Ross to the station. He thought much of her during his journey to London; and, when he wrote to his friend, he asked if he had not been playing the harmless *ruse* of introducing him to his bride-elect without acknowledging her as such, that he might learn to know her free from prejudice?

Then the Earl wrote and told him of Helena.

From some cause, that letter did not reach its destination.

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET'S SACRIFICE.

Jesus, Victim, comprehending
  Love's divine self-abnegation,
Cleanse my love in its self-spending,
  And absorb the poor libation!
Wind my thread of life up higher,
Up, through angels' hands of fire. . . .

BERTHA IN THE LANE.

LORD CRANFORD called upon Margaret the following morning. He wished to tell her of his coming marriage before he left Manchester; but, when he was shown into the drawing-room, he found her surrounded by a bevy of girls—old school-fellows, who were on their way north, and had stayed to see "that dear, queer Margaret Seymour, who has actually left her beautiful home in Wales to help her brother, who is a clergyman. I am sure *I* could not have done it, mamma." Thus wrote one of the sisters —Kate, of the Elm Hall days.

The Earl soon saw there was no chance of having any quiet conversation, with those four damsels sitting there scanning him, making mental comments, and all the time looking as demure as English girls *will* look when they are more wide-awake or more bent on mischief than usual. So he rose to leave.

Margaret did not know how wistful she looked as he said, "This is farewell!"

Then, in a low voice—inaudible to the rest—he said, holding her hand, "I came to say something to you this morning which I have long wished to say; but (with a glance at her guests) this is scarcely the time. May I write?"

If her life had hung on the utterance of a syllable, Margaret could not have uttered it. She was only conscious of a sweet, confused happiness, of a delicious heart-throbbing. Her brain was dizzy. For an instant she stood motionless. The Earl misinterpreted her looks and hesitation, inferring that she scarcely liked that arrangement.

"Or to your brother?" he said, quickly.

Then she bowed, and had scarcely presence of mind to ring the bell. He pressed her hand, and in a moment he had gone.

She ran to her room. The talk of those girls, she felt, would be almost unendurable. But what exquisite happiness filled her whole being! It was impossible for her to misunderstand Lord Cranford's meaning; though his manner was not that of a lover whose future happiness depended upon her word; but it was consistent with his character. Calm and gentlemanly, almost knightly, just as she had often pictured him in days gone by, when the time would come for him to ask for some heart whose love he prized. Not impassioned, because so tender; not demonstrative, because so deeply earnest. Yes, she had drawn a fancied sketch of the Earl's wooing *some one*, and now, that some one was herself. The wooing-time was just dawning into the sweet, the delicate Love-day. She covered her face with her hands, even as she stood in her chamber alone. Every pulse was throbbing with feeling. She looked pale and calm; but her eyes were sparkling as she went down to the girls—who, girl-like, were instantly uttering, in chorus, praises of the Earl's looks.

"This is Lord Cranford, that Miss Paxton told us paid

Helena Davenant such attention at her birth-day ball, you know," said Kate.

"Yes," said Margaret, with a sudden start, recalling the Earl's emotion at the sight of Helena's picture; but the twinge of pain was gone instantly before the remembrance of his words—"I do not wish my friend to know anything of Miss Davenant"——that chimed with (and her heart danced to the music) "I came to say something to you this morning which I have long wished to say."

She was so buoyant that Kate said—

"How happy you look, Margaret! Much happier than you did when we walked up and down the corridor. Has Helena needed the fulfilment of your vow?" she whispered.

Margaret looked at her blankly for a moment, and then laughed uneasily.

"I have not heard anything of her for a long time," she said. Then the conversation ended.

They left at four o'clock. All five managed to cram in the brougham, and if a little, merry party of girls was to be found in all England, it was there. Edward met them at the station, and even his habitual gravity gave way before their merriment.

As they drove back—he and his sister—he looked more than once at Margaret. There seemed to be such a veiled joy in her face; her eyes so soft, yet so brilliant, brimmed over with a gladness that was not even shadowed by the occasional tremble of her mobile lips that told how much real feeling was embodied in her joy.

He made no remark; but when she said, turning a little aside—not looking at him—

"Oh, Edward! Lord Cranford called this morning. He—I think he is going to write to you——"

A suspicion darted into his mind—he thought he understood now why Bronwylfa's pearl had suddenly become a radiant gem.

Three days passed over—days which Margaret Seymour never, never lost from her memory. They were burnt on its tablets. They were like a clasp that bound together two distinct lives—her past, and her future; not more divided than if they had been the histories of the happiest and the most miserable of human beings.

On the fourth morning, Edward was preparing to visit Mrs. Greaves, when Margaret said she would accompany him.

"The morning is so lovely that really even Angel Meadow will be sunny, Edward," she said, "and I must see Mary Burns and Mrs. Latham."

Somehow, the little pew-opener seemed a sort of link to Longleat.

Margaret was in glorious spirits. She chatted gaily as they walked along, and many whom they passed turned again to look at that handsome, bright-looking girl who walked so statelily beside the gentleman who "mun be her brother, for they're like as two peas," remarked an admiring apple-vendor to one who did a roaring trade in "Chelsea buns," but who had hushed his thrice-double-bass—his renowned cry—a moment, to look at the striking couple.

"Bless you, Maggie!" said Edward, as he left her at No. 8, Byron's Court. "I am sure your very presence brings sunshine. No wonder I love you so much. You look so happy, my darling."

"Do I?" she said, with a blush and a smile; "I *am* happy, dear Edward."

That was his last look of her; those were her last words, as she turned into the cottage. He told her he should call for her at Mrs. Latham's.

She found Mary Burns ill—weak from want of proper food, and sadly depressed in spirit. Richard looked stern and gloomy. There was no prospect of the strike coming

to an end; and now, day by day, their little household treasures were going to buy the meagre food which scarcely kept body and soul together.

"Mr. Burns," Margaret said, cheerfully and kindly, "I am quite sure you have acted as you considered for the best; but it is working badly for you. Is there any chance of the strife coming to a close?"

He shook his head. She thought a while.

"Can you do anything but weave?"

"Aw con do aught as aw han a moind to, Miss Saymoor," he said. "It is na wark as aw'm feared on; but no mon, not if he wur th' king on th' throne, wi' a goold crown, an' a stick as lung as th' beadle's, should ha' my wark 'bout fair wage an' fair doin's—that shan be true!"

"Very just too, Mr. Burns. I quite agree with you. But suppose your master says, 'No man shall force me to alter my rate of wages;'—in the struggle, who falls underneath?"

Mary glanced at her husband. He gave no answer, but went out.

"Poor mon!" said his wife, pityingly; "he's fairly beat; but aw ne'er say'n nowt to him. Aw'd raythor grin an 'bide, an him clemmin'."

Little by little, by adroit sympathy, Margaret learned all their privations. She found, too, that Dick had been a gardener in his young days, and Mary's longing for a sight of green fields broke forth at the recollection of that.

Margaret devised a scheme in her own mind, of which, however, she said nothing; but, leaving a liberal sum with Mrs. Burns, and engaging her for some light service in Edgware Street during the following week, she left the cottage, strengthened for her life of usefulness by this contact with real misery—real want.

The lodge-keeper at Bronwylfa had just died. Margaret thought if she could procure the situation for Richard

Burns, what a blessing it would be! He could mow the lawns, and keep the shrubberies in order, if he could do nothing else. She indulged in a picture of poor Mary in her thatched home, with the roses peeping in at the lattice, and the honeysuckle (that name is so much prettier than woodbine) framing her door; and she indulged in the vision until her arrival at Mrs. Latham's dispelled the Arcadian scene. She went up the stairs with a light step, pausing at the door a moment because she heard voices within; for Margaret was so frequent a visitor now, that, if no one was below, she went at once to the invalid.

"It is Edward," she thought, lifting the latch; but by the bed sat an exceedingly good-looking young man—out of livery, but that he was a gentleman's servant she saw at once—and as instantly he could be no other than the Earl's valet.

"I will not disturb you, Mrs. Latham," she said, going to the bed. "This is your son, I am sure."

"Ay, that's my Robert," said the mother, with pride.

Robert had risen, and placed a chair for her.

"I will not stay now," she said, "thank you. Are—are they all well?"

"Quite well, madam. The Countess returned to Longleat on Monday. My Lord is there now."

"Aw wur fair dazed, Miss Saymour, when I seed my Robert again this mornin'. He's coom back for summat—aw dunna know what; but it's a' reet as aw han gotten a seet on him."

"Is this Miss Seymour?" said Robert, eagerly. "Madam, Miss Clara left on Monday. She was quite well. I heard my Lady tell the Earl so; he had been in Scotland."

Margaret was struck by Robert's thoughtfulness.

"Is Lord Cranford well?"

A bright look came into the man's eyes at the sound

of his master's name, and a smile remained on his face —as if he had something on his mind which he was half wishful to say.

Margaret felt shy, being conscious of her own feeling. It was a delicious self-consciousness, loving as she loved.

Robert said "Good-bye" directly; his train was almost due. Margaret saw his mother's excitement, and she offered to arrange the flowers he had brought. This gave Mrs. Latham a little quiet time to dry her tears unseen.

When Miss Seymour returned with the beautiful blossoms, she placed them close by the bed-side, that the invalid might smell their refreshing odors; and, what was far better, she talked of Robert the while.

"What has brought him back so soon?" she asked. "The Earl has only just left Manchester."

"Summat—aw dunnot know what; but aw reckon it's a part o' th' thing. When such like is agate, there's a deal o' business, yo known."

"What do you mean?"

"Mebbe yo dunnot know, Miss Saymour. Aw'd welly forgotten i' seein' my Robert, aw had for sure. Th' Earl is gooin' for t' be wed. Aw'm mithered wi' th' news, for, dun yo see, Robert had ne'er tould me. But say! he did na know hissel. It wur but t' other day as ony on 'em know'd. My Robert is so fain. He says as th' young lady is th' beautifullest he e'er seet eyes on. Aw think as he said hoo wur a Genril's dowter. At ony rate, he's summat i' th' soldierin' line. Aw'm thinkin' as her name is Danent. They're for t' be wed immediate."

The flowers did not fall, for they were grasped with the tenacity of a dead hand. She did not answer, for her white lips would not part. Her face, stern through the agony of that sudden blow, grew rigid as stone and death-

like as marble. Her eyes, fixed on Mrs. Latham, seemed to have lost their life; their lustre had vanished—left them like eyes when the soul has gone.

"They're makin' grand preparations at all th' Earl's houses," went on Mrs. Latham, not noticing her visitor; "an' if aw'm gradely weel, aw'm gooin' for t' see th' weddin'. Th' lady lives at a place they ca' Calton, or summat like it. It's near to Longleat, th' old Hall!"

A deep shuddering sigh, a cold shiver—and then something like a sense of what was due to her own dignity came to the stricken girl. She turned mechanically, put the flowers upon the table, and sat down.

Struck by her silence, Mrs. Latham looked at her.

"Shusie!" she called, in alarm. "Coom, wench, sharp. Miss Saymour's faintin'!"

Margaret rejoiced in the thought. She accepted a glass of wine (from the store she had sent herself) most thankfully. Never was wine more needed.

"Eh, dear me!" said Mrs. Latham. "Aw ne'er seed nowt moor like death."

At that instant Margaret heard Edward's step below.

"Ask him to stay down," she said to Susan. "I shall be there directly. Say nothing of my illness."

She went to the glass, but started back. Surely that was not *her* face! She dashed the water on her forehead, and rubbed her cheeks until they glowed; but her eyes still looked expressionless. She put on her bonnet, and told Mrs. Latham that Edward would not come up, as she was not well. By a great effort, almost superhuman, she added feebly—

"I must come another day, and talk of this wonderful news that Robert has brought."

"Edward, take me home. I don't feel well."

She said it so piteously, that Edward was dreadfully alarmed. He sent for a cab, and in a few moments they

were on their way to Edgware Street. He did not weary her by questions; but he shuddered as he thought of her look when she came downstairs.

She felt so wretched when they arrived at home, that she gladly consented to go to her own room to rest awhile; but she strongly resisted the idea of a doctor being sent for—the thought made her cheek burn.

"I am not ill," she said, with more impatience than Edward had ever seen in her. "Don't be foolish. I shall be with you at dinner."

And then, with the look of one heart-broken, she turned back, threw her arms round his neck, and, kissing his brow, said, with quivering lips—

"Edward, will you always love me?"

"Always, my darling. There is nothing on earth so precious as my pearl. What is it, Maggie, pet? What has troubled you?"

With her arms still there—the sister's chain of love—she bowed her head, and nestled close in his neck; but without speaking. Only a shiver ran through her, and a shuddering sigh burst from her lips.

He passed his arm round her, and held her closely—very closely. He felt that if he lost his sister—his noble sister—he should lose the best, the most precious gift God had sent him. His heart ached to see her misery.

"Maggie, dear! *Can't* you tell me what it is?"

Resolution was the offspring of her heart-ache: endurance was its twin sister; and patience laid her hand in blessing upon both. She raised herself, and kissed him.

"I have nothing to tell you, my own dear brother—only this: I have been foolish—so foolish as to have a faint. Surely a pearl may look pale without frightening its owner."

He could not be deceived, even by her unselfish fond-

ness. Manchester did not hold a more unhappy heart, a more anxious mind, than his. He pondered the reason of all this in vain.

She went to her room, turned the key very gently (in her consciousness she so feared suspicion, of which she would not have dreamed four sunsets since), and then, with one wild sob, she threw herself upon her bed. But afterwards, she lay so still that the summer-flies hummed round her—as they might have hummed within a room where a corse lay, she was as unheeding and as cold!

There was no other sound save the rustle of the curtains, as the wind swayed them to and fro. She lay so still that Edward, who listened intently, heard no sound;—so still that Hudson, who continually went into the room below, pronounced "Miss Marget asleep, for not a foot was stirrin'."

Four hours passed away. Then she raised her head. The first thing she saw, lying on a table near, was a brooch which Edward had lately given to her—one of those oftener to be met with in Italy than in England: a small head, exquisitely coloured. She had said it was like Helena.

"Oh," she exclaimed, "what have I been dreaming? I thought he loved me!"

Her cheeks burned; her eyes, dry, tearless, glittered with feverish misery. She turned her face upon the pillow with a groan.

She lived over again the last few months.

"Have I given my love unsought?" she murmured, as she recalled Cranford's looks, and words, and actions—they had all fostered her delusion. She could not help feeling thus bitterly towards him now.

Suddenly she rose, and knelt down, with her face buried in the coverlet, her arms stretched out in utter abandonment, her hands clenching the quilt tightly. Her very attitude expressed her wild despair; and if Edward had been

listening now, her awful sobs would have told him something of the girl's great agony.

She knew that she never, never could unlove that man; she knew that a life of solitariness was before her; for with no heart to give, *she* could never vow! She saw all this in that hour of desolation as clearly as Eve saw the vast wilderness of earth before her when the gates of Paradise had closed behind.

Oh, how that broken heart prayed for strength to hide its wounds! for patience not to murmur nor rebel! How she prayed—and then gentle tears rained down her cheeks—for him who had unwittingly robbed all her lifetime of its peace and joy! She prayed as only one like her would pray—for was there not still work for her to do?

"My selfish misery must not rob Thee, O God!" she said. "Thou couldst do without my poor help, in Thy vineyard; but I cannot do without Thee—without Thy tender compassion here—without Thy rest beyond."

And then William's death-hour came to her remembrance.

"He so suffered," she thought, "that my trial seems contemptible in comparison with his."

She rose from her knees, bathed her face, and went down to Edward, who met her at the foot of the stairs, looking fearfully anxious.

The morning's sunshine had all faded from her beautiful face—it never came back, but instead there was a peace that was serene, like the purity of the sky after sunset's splendour. But that did not come until time—long time—had passed away, bearing its record of her deeds, which were worthy of the "illustrious women" whose names sparkle as a diamond cluster on the sacred page.

Edward placed her tenderly on the couch, and then sat beside her in silence. He scarcely knew what to say, or how to act for the best. She lay with her eyes

closed—those poor, swollen, red eyelids! He bent down and kissed them. Then she looked at him, and smiled faintly.

"Maggie, darling, can I do anything for you?" he said, wistfully.

She knew his meaning, and, though she buried her face in his breast, he saw the red glow that mounted to the roots of her hair.

"Nothing," she whispered, "but pray for me."

He asked no more.

Two letters came by the evening's post. One was for Margaret. She opened it wonderingly, for the handwriting seemed strange yet familiar. It was signed "Helena Davenant."

The letter dropped from her trembling hands.

"This is too cruel!" she thought; and then her just spirit righted itself, and she took up the sheet again.

"I know you will feel inclined to throw this letter into the fire, dear Margaret; but if you only knew the queer, rambling, eventful life I have led since I last wrote, you would forgive me. I have been in perils both by sea and by land. I have not been shipwrecked, though I might have been; for Elspie (you remember dear old Elspie, of whom I talked at school, don't you?) would have it that it was 'Mair by the Laird's gudeness than our merits, or the gude ship's merits'—because the crew were Papists—'that we were not food for fishes.'

"Before I went to Italy, I was engaged, as I wrote to you. That engagement was broken for a time—then renewed—and afterwards Lord Cranford and I were divided by the blue Mediterranean. I am to be married at once. I have no mother, no sister—only a few formal acquaintances. I don't call them friends. I always feel as if they visited *Calton* as much as Calton's daughter. Some of

them will be at my wedding, of course. Lord Cranford's mother will be there to sanction, by her blessing, her son's marriage with me; but my heart craves for one other to stand beside me at God's altar—the Pearl who, in other days, would have kept me as pure as herself.

"Will you come and care for me, Margaret? or must I be married under the excommunication of your love?

"Cranford tells me he knows you, and that, of all his friends, you stand the highest in his regard.

"Write soon, for this is the last day of June; and before July's roses shall have faded, I shall be no longer (though always

"*Your*)

"HELENA DAVENANT.

"CALTON, *June 30th*, 18—."

"God help me!" prayed Margaret. And if Lord Cranford could have seen that stately girl's look of anguish, with her blighted life before her, her love—so sacred—given in vain, some remorse would have surely marred the happiness of his.

"I cannot go," was her instinctive thought; but then her vow flashed to her remembrance: "Where her happiness is concerned, I will suffer that she may be at peace." Yes, those words came back like a forgotten dream.

"I will come," she wrote briefly. "And may the God of all our lives, the Giver of all our joys, so fill your cup with blessings, dear Helena, that earth shall *almost* win your thoughts from heaven."

Edward had left the room. He came back, and found his sister on the couch again.

"I have had a letter from the Earl," he said, gravely—not looking at her.

"I have had one from his bride-elect," she answered, quietly.

He started.

"I am going to the marriage."

"Surely not!"

"Why, Edward?" She looked at him firmly.

"I once fancied——" he said: then stopped.

"You fancied, Edward, lest you was not."

And then the brave girl covered her bleeding heart, and smiled cheerfully.

He felt somehow satisfied—yet not satisfied; but her dignity forbade any further allusion.

The letter from the Earl merely said that he wished Miss Seymour to know of his coming marriage, and invited Edward to assist at the service.

"We will both go, Edward," she said. "And afterwards——"

"What, darling?"

"We will live together—as the story-books say—'happy ever afterwards.'"

She said this with a smile; but she closed her eyes—and Edward heard the sigh that followed the words.

CHAPTER V.

VITA NUOVA.

> The roads should blossom, the roads should bloom,
> So fair a bride shall leave her home!
> Should blossom and bloom with garlands gay,
> So fair a bride shall pass to-day!
>
> LONGFELLOW.

THE day had been lovely enough to be singled in remembrance even from a summer so splendid that it had been an unbroken succession of radiant suns. It might have been that she longed to atone for the stormy humours of her sister, Spring—so clear were her deep azure skies; and this, the 15th of July, had been more beautiful than all.

Helena, wearied by the thousand perplexities of her position as bride-elect and hostess, oppressed with heat, and still more tired by an interview with her father and his solicitor, took up her hat, when she left the library, and went out for a lonely stroll.

An immense kitchen-garden—deserving the name of orchard, from its number of fruit-trees—lay to the left of the Hall, beyond a thick, high beech-hedge. She went through an arch of green leaves, down a trellis-covered walk, and entered the garden, walking on quickly until she came to a part where the trees were thinned, and from which opened a magnificent prospect. A very old man, once a gardener, now a pensioner of the General, occupied a garden-seat there.

"I thought I should find you here, Thomas," she said.

"Ay, ay, my Lady. I'm allus here at this time, if weather permits. It's the most beautiful sight in the world to see the sun set atween two trees."

At another time Helena would have smiled at his words; but to-night she felt too tender towards everyone and everything connected with her old home, for this was her last night there.

Old Thomas, with his bent figure and wrinkled face, turning such an earnest gaze on that sinking sun, presented a strange contrast to the youthful creature standing by his side. They were both silent, until a sudden and a brighter burst of radiance filled all heaven with glory, and bathed the trembling leaves with gold.

"How glorious!" exclaimed Helena. But the aged man took off his hat, and rose, leaning on his stick—standing thus reverently until the brilliance, which lingered for a moment on the horizon, paled, and there was nothing left but rival hues of softest violet and rose.

"'Behold, He spreadeth his light.' 'He clotheth Himself with light as with a garment,'" said the old man.

As he spoke there came the sweet peal of the distant village bells. Louder, nearer, the breeze bore the sound, wafting it through trees on which fruit hung in heavy clusters. Above them, around them, in the air, through the welkin, floated that welcome to the coming bride. She listened, and in listening turned aside weeping.

Thomas stood perfectly still, his eyes fixed on the ground, one hand behind his ear to bring the music nearer. A thrush, that had been hopping on the grass, where the sun had burnished its brown feathers and lighted up its pretty speckled breast, winged to a branch above Helena, and then poured forth its delicate sweet notes, that seemed a fairy song to the accompaniment of

those bells. Helena, being over-excited, sobbed aloud. The old man, who, many a time in her babyhood, had carried her through this garden, and had given her, secretly, tastes of forbidden fruits, still stood silent, as if that were truest sympathy. It was rare thoughtfulness, for there are few in these later days who emulate the comforters of ancient time.

After a while, her excitement spent itself.

"Thomas," she said, "I am leaving you to-morrow."

"I was just minding the time when your mother came, Miss Helena. It was such a God-sent night as this; but there was no church-bell-ringing to welcome her—for the General had never sent word as they were coming—and all the servants, and tenantry, and ringers felt it sorely. Well-a-day! well-a-day!" relapsing into forgetfulness of her presence, and talking to himself. "She was a bonnie bride; but not too bonnie for the trouble to follow after her. And, Miss Helena," he said, remembering her presence again, "I cannot but think of the night when the Earl of yon Longleat brought the Countess home—that was before your father's weddin'-time. Eh, but that were a day! for long enough the ground showed where the ox was roasted. There was a grand feast, both for chief tenants and poor ones; and the little children had their share. Such a weddin'-peal as rang in yon old tower that day has never been heard since."

"Was she happier than my mother?" asked the child, in a trembling voice, her large purple eyes dilating with eager interest.

She looked very pale; but the old man did not notice her emotion. His thoughts had gone back to that long-ago time which he could far better recal than the events of yesterday.

"Ay, ay," he said, nodding his head, still standing, with bent back, leaning on his staff. "Ay, ay; happier

a deal. I'm hoping, Miss Helena, that you—(why, it's none long since I carried ye up and down, and gave ye bits of pine, and a rare juicy peach, or a purple grape with most bloom on as I could find; an' then," the old man chuckled, "we had for to run, had you and me, Miss Helena, for fear nurse would come. And your pretty white fingers 'ud clutch at th' fruit till your white frock was all stained. Ye were a bonnie little lady!)—I'm hoping ye'll be as happy and good as the last Earl's lady, her as has mourned him so long. Happier!—Ay, ay, poor lady."

Helena's tears had ceased dropping, but she heard those words whilst her own welcome was ringing in her ear—mingling with the sound of the mower's scythe upon the near lawns, with the tinkling of sheep-bells in the meadows, with the song of the bird in the tree. Everything was peaceful—so peaceful, so beautiful—around the home to which her mother came; and now, she lay in a far-off grave, uncared for.

"Thomas," she said, in a whisper that was freighted with tender sorrow; "Thomas, was my mother *always* sad?"

The old man looked away from the lonely child—so pure-looking—far away to the heaven where glory had just been.

"Miss Helena, I was a great deal about the Hall; I worked in yon flower-beds on the terrace, where she'd walk till I should have thought she'd drop——"

"Then you saw her very often?"

"Very often; and, Miss Helena, I never saw her smile."

One quick, tearless sob—and then she asked no more. After a pause—

"I want you to take this, Thomas, as a parting gift. I am not going far away. I shall often come home; but

you must get something to remind you of me—and"—her voice faltered—"for the sake of my mother, as well as the time when you gave me grapes, and carried me, I should like to see you often."

He did not heed the gift, but taking off his hat again, and placing it on the seat, he rested one hand on the staff; the other he lifted high, and, with his face raised, his eyes closed, his long white hair falling back, he gave his blessing to his master's child. The bells had ceased, the song of the thrush had ended; there was nothing to disturb the prayer he uttered for her, or the benediction that he gave.

She clasped his hand with kindly grace.

"You will be in the chapel, Thomas?"

"Ay, Miss Helena, ay. I've seen three generations of your father's house. Ye are the last of his race. Sure it would be ill-betiding if old Thomas stayed away."

She left him, and went into the gardens. The grass there had all been swept carefully. Shadows lay thick beneath the trees, but the flower-beds were gay in the distance; and on all the green terraces rows of flowering plants had been placed, fringing, too, every flight of steps —row after row, tier after tier: the effect was brilliant in the extreme.

Everything was still, for this was the sweetest hour in all the twenty-four—when Nature seems, like a little child, to have folded her meek hands, and gone to sleep with prayer.

As Helena stood looking on all these preparations of the gardeners, her heart was deeply moved. She felt, as she had never felt before in her isolated life at Calton—that she was cared for. She went up the steps into the "rosary"—there, even, not one dead leaf lay; and the exquisitely-perfumed flowers made the place a bower of Eden.

The General had placed in his daughter's hand a very well-filled purse; the contents he wished her to distribute among the domestics at her own discretion. She gladdened the hearts of all the gardeners she could find. She left the men, so busy in the rosary and on the terraces, and went quickly to the fall—where Lord Cranford had his interview with her father. She could not stay long, for night was coming, and she knew she would be wanted within-doors; but she wished to say good-bye to the dear old stream, that awed her when she stood before it a wee toddling thing, holding Elspie's dress; good-bye to the old ash, on whose boughs she had often sat then; good-bye to the flowers, which bloomed year after year, and seemed to be ever the same—not sister-blossoms, but the old come back again. How she loved the fall! with its misty spray, its emerald cave, and, above all, its memories! She stood on its brink, thinking and thinking, until quite lost in reverie.

Her past life was slipping away—it was only held by a finger now. Her future was unread—she could not look into it. But she thought of Miss Landon's words—that such a step as the morrow's was "Standing on the threshold of youth, and flinging its flowers behind you." She gathered one or two of those at her feet, to keep as relics of her last night in her home. Then she went to the avenue which led to the chapel.

That chapel almost deserves a chapter, it was so beautiful. The chronicles of the Hall told of a fire, more than a hundred years ago, which had destroyed all but one wing, and this sanctuary. Its age was scarcely known; but that could be traced as far back as the twelfth century—for Calton, it must be said—that is, the old Calton—was once a monastery; and in this chapel there were low, worm-eaten doors, that led to cells, whence, no doubt, many a cowled saint had winged his way to heaven. A stone

passage led to it from the General's library; but that way had never been used in Helena's life. It had been thrown open for the morrow, lest the day should be wet; its Gothic windows had been wreathed with leaves; its stone floor carpeted with crimson, and lined with flowers, to make it cheery if the bride should pass through it to the altar. But all the household hoped the weather would be propitious, for no effort could make that passage otherwise than chill and gloomy.

Here all the Davenant line lay buried; and here for centuries the daughters had spoken their marriage vows. Helena could not help thinking how strange it seemed that, of all the house, her mother should alone lie desolate in death!

The entrance to the chapel was through a long thick-set avenue, under which the mossy sward was always beautifully green. The General had sometimes talked of having it gravelled, on account of its sponginess after rain; but somehow, another visit was sure to alter his resolution, for nothing could have been so lovely. Hence, year after year passed away, and, in spring, the crocuses and prim-roses, which had been profusely scattered in the mould, sprang up again, scenting the air, so that, when the doors of the chapel stood open, it was filled with their perfume—better than all the stifling incense—or nonsense—of sense-gratifying Rome. Even the steps were cut in the moss, and on the very threshold the flowers grew. There was no tower to the chapel—nothing but a cross-crowned arch, in which hung the bell swung by old Thomas every Sabbath morning with right good will; but the clang came muffled from a nest of ivy-leaves.

The superstitious folk in the village were accustomed to say that Calton chapel was haunted; an idea that had been suggested by the screeching of the owls, that sounded mournfully in the night, as if they were the cries

of those buried down below, who, "After life's fitful fever did *not* sleep well." The chapel was famed for its curious carving. All the windows were painted. The subject of that over the Communion was "The Ascension;" and underneath, above the table, there was neither creed, nor commandment, nor prayer—simply these words: "I will draw all men unto Me." By what ancestor's arrangement no one knew; but so it remained.

Helena and her father did not always occupy the great room-like pew, with its high gates, that separated them from the household, who alone formed the congregation; for the General very rarely went to a place of worship, and Helena was fonder of the quaint old pew in Longleat church, where she liked, on Sunday afternoons, to see the farmers, very red and very drowsy, sitting beside their comely wives and their pretty daughters, so fresh and so fair, with their white folded handkerchiefs and little bunches of lavender or monthly roses—than which no flowers are more sweet or fair. She felt lonely there, but much more lonely in the chapel-pew, where the housekeeper once said to Elspie, "Poor little thing! she looked like a lone sparrow on the house-top;" which unpoetic remark greatly incensed Elspie, because the sparrow had neither "sang nor white-wing, but was just sent by the Laird to keep ill-bred things down."

Helena liked the chapel best in the long summer evenings, when she with old Thomas to blow, would sit at the organ, and delight herself with the rich Masses of Mozart, or with the wild, weird airs of other German masters, that touched chords within the child's soul which she herself could not understand; but she felt their vibration, and sometimes, after playing for a while, she would lay her head down upon the instrument and weep without cause—only "because the music was so very beautiful." The time had yet to come when all the depths of that rich

nature would be shown even to herself. She turned into the avenue, through which the light fell dimly. The mossy ground had been swept—but that was not all. Something glittered on either side, under the trees. She looked, and found that widths of mirror-glass had been inserted in the grass, the whole length of the avenue; why, she could not imagine, until she came nearer to the chapel, where a few water-lilies had been laid down as a trial of effect, and where huge basins, in which the same flowers floated, told the purpose for which they were designed. The mimic water was carried up the steps to the porch, in which tall plants of the suggestive and graceful "Solomon's seal" were placed, backed by dark-green shrubs.

Helena was surprised beyond expression. Tears filled her eyes as she passed within the now sombre chapel. Numbers of men were busy by lamp-light, decorating it with flowers and leaves. She stopped in the doorway spell-bound—the scene was so beautiful, the air so fragrant!

The ancient brass chandelier, with its many branches, that hung from the roof of the chapel, was wreathed with Cape jasmine and pink roses amid green leaves. On each black oak cross at the end of the benches was hung a laurel crown. The pulpit-stairs were twined with flowering sprays, blended with a taste and discrimination that had reference to perfume as to colour. Even the little clock in the organ-loft was so buried in roses, that you could not tell the hours as they passed—as if they who had paid the bride this graceful tribute trusted in it for an omen that the sweetness of that one bridal hour might last through all the flight of Time!

Helena stopped at the altar as one in a dream. Within the rail was a bed of freshly-gathered moss. White lilies were embossed in its cool depths forming this sentence: "I will pay my vows unto the Lord, now in the presence

of his people." Round the altar-rails were the same white flowers—not whiter than she who stood before them with folded hands, and head bent in earnest feeling.

She was surprised, almost bewildered, by these beautiful arrangements. The longer she gazed, the more deeply she was touched; and at last the scene seemed to fade from her sight. She knelt down, and laid her brow upon the fresh green leaves, too oppressed for the relief of tears.

"Helena, my darling, why are you here alone?" It was the voice of Lord Cranford. "I have been seeking my wandering little one everywhere."

She rose, turned towards him totteringly—*so* like a little child, and laid her head upon his breast with a sobbing sigh.

It was not Helena's way to shed many tears. Seldom had Cranford seen her yield to them. She now tried to control her excitement, which was on the very verge of tearful expression.

"Cranford," she said, "I feel as if my future lay in shadow."

"My dearest!" he answered quickly, not caring to show his pain, "that is only because you are over-excited, and because your future is *untried*. Look at those lilies, my own love. Are they not emblems of hope?"

Even whilst he was speaking, the gardeners and other men-servants of the household (for every one of them had united heart and soul in these preparations for their young lady's marriage) were lighting other lamps, so that the whole chapel was illuminated.

"See, Helena," he said, cheerfully. "Look up, my precious one, and know how much you are cared for."

Her answer was a burst of tears.

The Earl looked round with a glance of entreaty at some one who stood in shadow.

"I think you are over-tired, darling."

"No, Cranford; it is not that. I want my mother now."

"Dear child!"

At the sound of those pitiful words, the lady, who had been close by, came forward, and motioning the Earl aside, took the weeping girl in her arms.

"Helena!"

"Margaret! Oh, how very, very glad I am!"

The gush of delight in that voice, the joy in those brimming eyes as the face was raised, was Margaret's first reward for her faithfully-kept vow.

Helena kissed her passionately, again and again repeating, "I am so very glad."

Margaret, in a little while, held Helena back. She wanted to look at this girl, whose happiness had blighted *hers*. With a faint sigh, she laid the golden head upon her breast again.

"No wonder that Lord Cranford had gone back to so much loveliness. It was more an angel's face than a woman's," she thought. "You are going to be very happy, little one."

They might have been at Elm Hall still. The child-bride could have fancied so.

"I think I am, Margaret."

"God grant it."

If ever a breaking, pierced, bleeding heart hid its wounds beneath heroic patience, it was then and there. Margaret Seymour's religion was not born of sunshine. It could stand the hoar winter, the severe blast. It could endure trial—and now the trial *had* come; and with noble self-abnegation, with a full consciousness that her whole life was blighted, she prayed—fervently prayed—that simple prayer, "God grant it."

Ah! when a true woman loves, it is unselfishly.

One by one the lights were extinguished, excepting in the organ-loft, where the Longleat choir was practising that sublime anthem for the morrow, "Ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth in peace." The three stood for a while listening to the music; then the Earl drew Helena's hand upon his arm, and they went down the aisle into the porch, Margaret following them through the faint light into the deeper shadow of the trees. The last sound they heard was "forth in peace."

Miss Seymour walked by Helena's side down the avenue—not holding her hand, for the child had clasped both hers on her future husband's arm, and with that buoyancy which so distinguished her, she seemed to have rallied from her deep emotion as if it had never been; and now and then she danced rather than walked, whilst she talked laughingly to her friend, and teased the Earl.

Margaret marvelled. She could not understand these rapid changes of feeling. It was so natural to her to be thoughtful, earnest, grave; equally natural to Helena to be so light hearted as to turn easily from sorrow, to ride over care.

Such girls are always to be feared for. It seems so certain that God has sent the buoyancy of spirit because of the burdens which will be laid upon them.

Just as they came up to the Hall, Lord Cranford stopped, and, taking Helena's hands in his, said,

"My darling, I want to ask you something. Are you quite happy? Can you trust your future with me without one single fear? God knows I would rather suffer all my life than lose this precious hand; but He knows, too, that I would rather die than you should give it to me without all your love—all your *trust*."

Why was the Earl so anxious in this last hour? Was it because he was conscious that, however kindly his intention, the deception he had practised upon his bride would

still be recorded against him when she should be his wife? Both the girls were startled by his words and manner. The grey arch was so dim, that only Helena's white dress gleamed. He could not look into her face.

Margaret stood a pace off, listening tremblingly. They could not see her white face, her eager eyes, her tightly clasped hands. There was a moment's pause.

"Cranford, why do you ask this?"

"Cannot you tell, Helena? Did you not say some time ago at St. Hilda's, 'I am so sad?' And now, on the eve of our marriage, you say 'your future seems all shadow.'"

"I cannot tell *why* I said so, Cranford. I can trust you. I love you; but I hope I shall come to love you very much more. I do not feel very happy. I am leaving Calton."

There was no enthusiasm in this, but it was maidenly, and what more could he require?

He sighed gently, and they passed within; but on the threshold Helena turned, and, raising herself on tip-toes, volunteered the grace of a kiss for the first time. It is not necessary to say with what interest it was returned.

A chill had passed over Margaret. She did not believe that the depths of that girl's heart had been sounded by the Earl. It had been her great solace that he would be loved, as much as *she* would have loved him, and the stay was gone.

Helena was laughing merrily; for, after that kiss, Cranford would not let her go: but she tore herself away, leaving her blue sash in his hand.

"Come, Margaret," she said.

When they were in the hall, she threw her arms round Margaret's neck, and pressed her scarlet lips to her cheek, exactly as she had used to do when they were school-girls at Elm Hall, and she wanted "to make friends again."

Margaret's heart warmed to the impulsive, beautiful girl, who so little guessed the misery lying underneath that calm dignity.

They went up the stairs, where statues held fancifully-devised globes and shades of all kinds for the lights. But she exclaimed, as they entered a long, arched gallery, for there were artificial trees on which hung illuminated fruit.

"Are they not pretty?" said Helena. "It was my idea. I believe papa thought I was of some use in the world for once."

Miss Seymour would not notice the bitter tone, but said kindly:

"Your father is determined to honor you, Helena. I had no idea that Calton was so magnificent."

Its mistress shrugged her shoulders.

"One gets used to it," she answered, carelessly. "But papa has surprised me. At one time he thought the Earl ought not to marry me because—I wasn't rich enough, or something, or that I couldn't inherit Calton, being a girl—the Salic law has not been repealed in the house of the Davenants—and so I suppose papa is determined to show that, at any rate, his only child is not penniless."

As Helena spoke, she threw open a door, and they passed into her own boudoir.

"I am going to the sacrifice in the old classic way, Margaret," she said, in her mischievous spirit; "decked with flowers. As for this thing," touching her dress, "it's nothing more than like one of those field-clocks, from which little children in the village blow the hours. Look!"

She took up the dress, and threw it high, to the horror of her attendant, who caught it in alarm. Margaret could not help laughing.

"I wish to-morrow were over," said the child.

Margaret stroked her hair gently, and said,

"That will soon be, dear. Try to think of it as a

religious service, for which you will need all the calmness God can give you."

Helena was pulling a flower to pieces. Margaret thought how beautiful she looked. Suddenly Helena raised her head and said,

"I fear I have not thought seriously enough of it, Margaret."

"You don't repent, Helena?"

Another, beside Margaret, waited for the answer.

"Indeed I don't."

"May God bless you, my daughter!"

In another moment Lady Cranford held Helena in her arms, and then they went away together to Elspie's room.

"Are you ill, Elspie?" she asked, finding the dame in bed.

"Nane ill, bairn; but greetin' mak's sair wark wi' the auld."

She fixed her eyes on the child bending over her, as if every moment were precious.

Helena got upon the bed, and laid her cheek close to Elspie's, on the pillow. For several minutes not a word was said.

"The Laird is verra gude," said the old woman in a tremulous voice. "I mind the time when the mither that bare ye, an' now sleeps in yon' vine-land ower the sea, gave ye, bonnie babe! in these twa arms, an' said, 'She's yer ain child, Elspie, for the comin' time.' Hae I nae luved ye, bairnie? Oft-time my heart was sair for ye. I thocht the Laird's way was nae the gude way; but now, lammie, though I mind the darkness o' the past, I ken the Word is sure, for I hae *seen* the 'licht at eventide.' My ain puir faith wad be waefu'* to the Laird, with whom it wad be a' weel kenned; but ye wunna suffer, bairnie. Auld Elspie's wyte† wunna be laid to ye. Ye'll be luved

* Sorrowful. † Fault.

an' tended, pretty lamb! Nae dreariness for ye i' the comin' time! I wad like to see the Earl the nicht. Wull ye mind to reverence him as the Beuk bids a' wives, Miss Helena? Wull ye just grup the quick spirit when it rises, an' lay it doun beneath the obedience an' the luve ye'll vow the morn'?"

"I will, nurse."

"An', bairnie, if the trouble comes, wull ye bide in patience, an' tak' counsel o' the Laird? Ye'll find it ower true what's written. He careth for ye, an' his mercy endureth for ever. Ye'll be a bonnie sicht the morn that's wearin' to its glint—sae bonnie, that every heart in yer father's hoose wull pray a blessin' on ye; but, chield! chield! there's niver a dawn sae bricht that nae clud bides somewhere i' the shine. Tak' yer steps a'thegither—ye an' yer husband, the Earl—an' ye'll find the licht an' the darkness baith alike to hearts that luve. Dinna greet, my lammie. Angels wull list to yer marriage bells, an' may-be they'll fill the chapel wi' their sangs."

Elspie's fine face glowed with the enthusiasm of her pride and love. It was very striking to Lady Cranford, who listened in astonishment to her words. There was a dignity, a force, a pathos in all she said, that was so unusual. Helena, accustomed to it from her earliest memory, heard nothing unusual. And Elspie herself had not surprised the Countess more than did her nursling, when she suddenly, in a most matter-of-fact tone, exclaimed,

"I have got something for you to wear to-morrow, nursie."

And then she slid off the bed and ran away, returning with a small case. She watched the effect upon Elspie with delight.

"Eh, bairnie! but it's just the shadow o' your ainsel! gowden locks an' violet een. Tell me, wha painted the same?"

"It was done in Italy, Elspie, at the time papa had my likeness taken, you know; so I had two of these little ones done. This I always meant for you."

It was the duplicate of Lord Cranford's, and had been set in gold for Elspie as a brooch.

"You must wear it so, Elspie," fastening it in the flannel shawl round her shoulders. "And don't you say you have lost your bairn, when she is there lying on your breast."

Elspie raised her large-veined hand, and covered her eyes. They could see the working of the muscles in her throat, and they heard the half-suppressed sob. Helena looked at her with the tears in her own eyes. The Countess, who had listened to their conversation with interest, looked sympathising now. She felt very much for the foster-mother.

When Elspie took her hand from her eyes, the tears were on her face.

"My bairnie," she said, "I wad like to see ye in your marriage-goun."

"I will run and put it on, nursie."

Away she went.

Elspie sighed drearily, as if she were losing her all.

"Don't grieve, nurse," said Lady Cranford, kindly. "You will be so near to your charge, that it will not be losing her; and, if you don't mind leaving Calton, Longleat can also be *your* home. We shall all love her there."

"The Laird bless you, Leddy; but it's ill movin' an auld tree; an' it's just the bit o' licht fadin' frae my ain hearth-stane—that's a'."

She said this with touching resignation. Words of comfort died on the lady's lips.

In the meantime, Helena was quickly donning her dress, to the consternation of Margaret and the maid, who feared for the frail fabric.

Miss Seymour, pale and grave, tried to tone down the girl's excitement. Just as the dressing was over, a tap was heard, and the Earl entered. He stood still, as if he feared the beautiful vision before him would evaporate.

She stood mute and blushing.

Margaret raised her veil, and said, with a sorry attempt at a smile,

"She *is* human, Lord Cranford."

He came forward, laughing.

"Is she, Miss Seymour? I really thought my promised bride had turned into an elf. Darling, you look so very beautiful. And what is all this cloud? Is it cobweb?"

"That is Honiton, sir," answered the maid, so gravely that they all smiled.

He went with her into Elspie's room. Both she and the Countess exclaimed at the sight; but Elspie said,

"Ye are just like the snaw-flake that has taen the prent o' the flower it drifts on. Ye are a braw sicht for the Earl's een."

"Are you content to give her to me, Elspie?"

She looked at him earnestly.

"My Laird, there's been nae dawn so bricht for auld Elspie as wull be the dawn o' your marriage-morn. The Laird Himsel bless ye baith, an' deal wi' ye as ye are faithfu' to ane anither."

Then they left her, and Cranford waited for the three ladies before going down.

Margaret was sleeping to-night at Calton. There were a few guests in the saloon when they went down. The same Bishop who had confirmed the two girls at school, and who was a cousin of the Countess, was to perform the marriage ceremony. He was there now, having with him two of the six bridesmaids—his nieces. They had driven over for an hour.

Lady Cranford had not seen the General since the ball. They were each a little agitated. Neither could overlook the strangeness of the fact that their children—after their own peculiar relation to each other—were about to be united.

Refreshments were served in the saloon. Margaret was much impressed by the General. She wondered how his unenviable notoriety had come to pass; she felt so certain that his seclusive habits were born of some past great sorrow.

Perhaps her thought was evidenced in her face, for she attracted the General as much as other girls repelled him. She brought back the Mary Cleveland of his youth, and when he saw how much the Countess seemed to love her, he wondered how it was that her son had passed her by.

"Are you not well, Miss Seymour?" he inquired.

She started, and colored.

"Not quite, General Davenant."

"My sister has been an invalid, and left her room to travel," said Edward.

Helena exclaimed, "Oh, Margaret! how thoughtless I have been."

"Is that an unusual circumstance?" asked her father, drily.

Margaret saw the rising color, and said, gently,

"She would have been more than human to have divined what she did not know, sir."

The General smiled at both the girls, and Cranford thought, "Ah! there is no daysman like a loving, gentle woman."

Would that she, without whom even Eden was desolate, would oftener use her influence in the strife that warreth against peace!

By half-past eleven the guests had all gone, with the exception of the Earl, who had sent his mother, in charge of Edward, to Longleat.

"I will walk through the wood," he said. So long as there was a chance of Helena's non-retiring, he would remain.

Margaret, Helena, and the Earl went into the banqueting-hall, where many servants, the house-steward, and the housekeeper were giving the finishing touches to the arrangements. Mrs. Cawley was as flustered as it was possible to be—something had gone wrong.

"Miss Davenant," she said, "I never did know how aggravating folks could be at a pinch. Mervall has never sent those partickler glasses that your pa ordered; and if he knows—and nothin' does escape him, from a scratch on the gold plate, to a hair in his horse's tail—there'll be a to do."

"Never mind," said Helena; "you have everything so nice. Go away, Lord Cranford" (in an aside), "it will be all the same a hundred years hence."

The Earl went to Miss Seymour. "Helena," he said, as the child-like mistress of all this splendor came to them, "do you suppose the Millennium is to be a hundred years hence?"

"I don't know, my Lord. I know that I have to pass through Purgatory first," she said, lightly.

"Branvers, those scarlet flowers must not be so near the monthly roses."

She glided away. The Earl looked at Miss Seymour, laughing, but she had heard nothing. That brilliant room might have been an open grave. With her eyes fixed on the floor, she was saying to herself, "The last night in which I may love him without sin—the very last! Oh, my God, my God, what have I done to deserve my fate?"

"You look very tired," he said, noticing her ghastly paleness. There was no seat near. He took her hand and drew it through his arm. "Lean on me," he said. "*Poor Margaret!*"

She shivered. A deathly faintness was stealing over her. It was the first time he had so called her.

"We cannot repay you for this trial," he went on, "this trial of strength."

"Oh, don't," she exclaimed, with a piteous sob.

Ah, it was this same seeming interest, this seeming love, that had for ever robbed her of her peace.

"Nay," said Cranford, surprised, "I would not distress you; but you must come and see us in our happiness, and then we may thank you—I may for your kindness to my darling——" He stopped, for her head drooped, he saw that she had fainted.

Helena and the housekeeper ran at his quick call, and then he himself carried her into the room close by, where they laid her on the couch and brought restoratives; but it was long, very long, before the least sign of life appeared.

As she opened her eyes, the Earl said, "Take this, Miss Seymour, will you? for our sakes." He raised her; and then her head fell upon his breast. Her eyes and lips were closed; Cranford held her tenderly: he thought she had fainted again; but she was conscious, though powerless to move. And as she so lay, with his hand, as gentle as a woman's, bathing her brow with eau de Cologne, and pushing back the dark soft braids, she only felt a longing to die just there, and be for ever at rest. The agony of that devoted heart was almost greater than its heroic strength could bear. She dared not look beyond the morrow, because the love she could not destroy would be so great a sin.

"I think she is a little better, sir." The sound of the voice caused her to open her eyes. Helena was standing pale and anxious, with a child's sorrow on her sweet lips, a child's terror in her lovely eyes, just ready to burst into tears; but the General was bending down with an anxious

gaze. There was a look on his face which struck a too-tender chord; she stretched out her arms to him impulsively, and as the Earl moved away, the General took her, laid her head upon his breast, and soothed her sobs with words so gentle, that Helena gazed and gazed in wonder, asking herself if this could be her stern father. It was God's own merciful will. In that hour a sympathy was born which made that Christian girl a ministering angel to the stricken man in the hour of his trouble, when no other could approach him. What he was to her now, she was destined to be to him then.

Our griefs are often to others also "blessings in disguise."

When the faintness had quite gone, Margaret declared she felt as if nothing had occurred, and went very cheerfully to her room. The Earl and Helena (Margaret leaned on Cranford's arm) took her to the corridor in which her apartments were.

She stood at the door a few moments chatting, "Fairy," she said, "you must go to rest. My Lord, use your authority."

"What say you, my darling?"

"This, Cranford, that I shall acknowledge no authority, and obey none."

He only laughed at her, and said, "Well, before Margaret" (this was the second time he had used the Christian name that night), "leaves, I want to confess. When you and I were—were separated, I told her our engagement was over for ever. Now I think it only right to tell you this. I have blamed myself for having done it often. Will you forgive the indignity?"

Involuntarily Margaret raised one hand to her eyes. Was her trial never to have an end? Why, why did he bring back that hour on the cliff on this night, when she was doing her best to forget it!

"I did not afterwards tell Miss Seymour of our coming marriage. Perhaps the chief reason of my silence was a feeling akin to the reverence which inclines us to whisper of subjects which we hold sacred. I did not like to talk of you; besides, I scarcely thought the pearl of Bronwylfa would care to listen to the rhapsodies of a happy lover. And so, little one, the secret was never told, until your letter and my letter carried the tidings of our joy."

No, not so. Margaret leaned against the wall, and looking up through the branches of the fruit-lamped tree, thought of the hour and scene when she had first heard what was to be; and with the agonized remembrance, she looked down upon Helena, and thought of her vow.

"Can you forgive me, Helena?"

Yes, she who was idolised, with a happy future before her; with a love to brighten its every-day serenity; to shield her in every storm; to soothe her every pain; to comfort her in every grief—with all this before her, *her* pardon was craved, and for what? because his confidence had been given to her friend; whilst that friend, deceived by a seeming interest; won by a seeming love; attracted by a noble nature that had forbade distrust; was left desolate now, and there was no pardon craved for a blighted life, that had once been so full of peace and joy; no pardon asked for that hopeless future which lay before her.

How unequal seemed their destinies. Helena drew herself away from him, evidently surprised.

"I did not know you had told Margaret," she said; "but I am not annoyed, Cranford. She was always my friend. Were you not, Margaret?"

Helena looked up into her face, and Margaret smiled faintly. Speak she could not.

"I don't see any reason to blame you, Cranford, if you have told me the whole truth. If there were other reasons

for our separation than those you named to me, and of which you told Margaret, I—I think it would be better to tell me now. It would make no difference; I should love you—I should marry you just the same; but I would rather know them now. You know papa said he wished it."

Margaret Seymour looked at the Earl, she was so surprised by Helena's words. She had never thought of the broken engagement but as the result of a lover's quarrel; had never cared to know more since she heard of the coming marriage; so that she was startled now, especially as Lord Cranford looked confused.

"I told you," he said.

"And that was all?"

"All." His voice was low, his manner hesitating.

"I never was quite satisfied, Cranford; if there were any other reason, tell it to me."

Just for an instant he thought, "Would it not be better? I can soothe her distress." But he thought again, "She is so proud, so wilful. She might refuse to marry me."

They stood there, those three, around whose lives fate had so strangely woven a web, which bound them together; they stood in silence a moment.

"There was no other reason, Helena."

Margaret trembled exceedingly. She felt wretched and unsatisfied; but Helena was differently constituted, and she said cheerfully, "I am quite happy then—quite."

A sharp pang went through his heart. For the second time he had had his truth tested; for the second time it had failed, and Peace, with a sigh unheard, spread her wings and slowly fluttered away.

When Margaret stole into Helena's room, after a restless, sleepless night, she stood by the little bed and

watched the smile that played on the dreaming girl's face. Her flushed cheek rested on her round, white arm. She would have been an exquisite model for a sleeping Hebe. Margaret was loth to disturb her; but it was late, and she roused her by a kiss. Helena opened her eyes, murmuring, "I am quite happy then."

Whilst the bride was dressing, news was brought to the Hall that the gamekeeper, who lived with Thomas in one of the lodges, had found him dead, dressed, and sitting in a chair by the bed, with a bank note spread upon his knee. Helena's maid told her abruptly, and then was rebuked for her incautiousness by seeing her mistress look as if she were going to faint. It was some time before the color returned to her cheek, for, although she said nothing of them, the words now rang mournfully and unceasingly in her ears, "It would be ill-betiding if old Thomas were away."

Yet there were no seeming shadows on the bride, save those of waving boughs and fluttering leaves, as leaning on her noble-looking father, she walked up the mossy avenue, with the mimic stream gleaming on either side, and the lilies lying there in pure loveliness. Solomon's seal bent before her as her bridal robes swept by. Her maidens waited for her in the porch, and her lover met her before she reached the altar, with such a look of love that the child's heart was thrilled; and Margaret Seymour's was torn again by pain that could not be healed.

Then with the triumphant organ peal sounding through the chapel, with the summer wind stirring the laurel crowns, and pendant sprays, she rose from the flower-girt altar Helena Davenant no more.

CHAPTER VI.

THE POOR YE HAVE ALWAYS WITH YOU.

Sorrow how avoid?
Let the employer match the thing employed,
Fit to the finite his infinity,
And thus proceed for ever; in degree
Changed, but in kind the same; still limited
To the appointed circumstance, and dead
To all beyond.

SORDELLO.

THE end of September had almost come, and Margaret was yet in Manchester. Mr. and Mrs. Seymour had thought it advisable that she should visit Bronwylfa after the Earl's marriage, but they urged in vain.

"Edward needs me so much, papa," she wrote, "and his people need me also; for starvation is doing its worst here. If you could see the homes of some of his congregation, you, too, would say to me, 'Stay.' My health would never be improved with a chiding conscience, which I should have if I returned to dear Bronwylfa before my work was done. I dare not leave it."

Had no other reason kept her in Manchester, the fact of Lord Cranford being at Ruthven would have been sufficient. But in truth she craved employment. The irrevocable past had set its seal upon her future. The one had not been more happy than the other was drear in prospect. The miseries which she compelled herself to

witness drew her attention from her own sorrows, and sometimes made her life seem brighter by contrast. That life, at this time, was one long-drawn thought for others. She devoted herself untiringly to Edward's flock, spending days beside the sick, giving counsel to helpless wives and mothers whose mill-lives had totally unfitted them for home duties. She found them deplorably ignorant in the simplest matters of domestic economy. Scarcely any could cook; most of them knew nothing of sewing, until they and their children were literally clothed in rags for want of the "stitch in time."

Alas! the days had now come in which the poorest raiment had to serve; and water-gruel was the fare of strong men. Fever had shown itself in Angel Meadow—a low, slow fever, the effect of want. Deaths were hourly occurring. Edward, at his sister's instigation, applied to some of his friends for aid, which was most generously responded to. In a week the "Parsonage" (as they called Edward's house) was, to borrow Hudson's words, "Nothin' no more than a soup-kitchen and wittle-shop."

Blame, in the beginning, belonged to these men; but a sudden depression in trade had followed. Most mills were on short time. Edward did not fail to point out the unreasonable folly of their past conduct, because some of those who could have befriended them refused to do so on the ground of the strike. They listened, because, whilst reproving, he pitied and helped them.

Richard Burns maintained his opinions, and held firmly that a strike was a poor man's right. He listened also to all Edward's arguments, but it made no difference.

"Only," he said to his wife, "aw can ne'er forget that while th' parson's agate o' talkin' a' thatten, he's puttin' th' mate i' one's mouth."

"Ay, mon," she said, "thae's hit th' nail on th' head for wunst. Nother him nur th' lady 'ull cram clemmin'

folk wi' tracts, as a deal o' th' quality dun when they goo what they ca' 'visitin' th' poor!' Same as if poor folk wur nowt but wild animals, as mun be looked at an' worrited i' their bits of homes whether they mind or dunnot mind. Methody Tom and Mester Saymour are o' th' reet sort. They dun as Christ did, as we heered i' th' chapter last Sunday—eh, mon, it wur reet nice wur that story!—when He seed th' multitude wur tired an' hungry, yo known, He stopped prachin' for t' tell 'em to sit down on th' grass, while He gen 'em their baggins wi' a meracle. That's th' road for t' make poor folk think as religion is nur o' talk. An' Methody Tom an' th' parson known it, an' they h'act on it. Ay, thae's hit th' nail for wunst."

Richard rubbed his shaggy head, scarcely approving his wife's mitigated compliment.

"Thae met think as aw ne'er did it afore," he said, in an injured tone. "Aw dunnot read th' weekly papper for nowt. Aw can tell a hand-loom fro' a spinnin'-jenny, for o' thae thinks aw'm so thick. Aw dunnot think as its gradely 'andsome i' thee to spake a' thatten to thee own mon, as thae ought for t' 'reverence.' Thae mebbe did na think at that chapter as th' parson read i' th' afternoon, tho' thae talks so glib abaät th' baggins."

"Eh, mon," she said, wearily, "Aw did na think o' thee settin' up thee back a' thatten at what wur ne'er meant. If aw thowt moor partickler at th' loaves, it wur because aw felt welly done i' my inside. Aw think it's fever comin' on me."

Richard looked at her in dismay.

"Now, if thae begins for t' cry, owd wench," he said, as Mary whimpered, "thae knows what th' con se quence 'ull be. Aw mun run; for aw ne'er yet gen thee a fou' word, an' aw wur only threäpin' a bit for t' get thee sperrit up."

She smiled; but it was a sad smile, for Mary was really ill.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays, Miss Seymour had had meetings in Mary's cottage, to teach the women cutting-out, darning, patching, etc.; and whilst they sewed she read to them. She wrote, in large round hand, such cooking directions as were suitable for their means, and pasted them on pieces of card-board, bound with ribbon. They hung on the walls of many a cottage, and were considered to be quite works of art.

Miss Seymour had no need of an escort now, though Jem Brierly, her lynx-eyed champion, followed her like her shadow. Not a man or woman in all that degraded neighbourhood would have failed to avenge an insult offered to her. Blessings followed her wherever she went.

Two weeks had passed without Miss Seymour having been seen. She had been delicate for some time, and was now confined to her room.

This morning, however, she pronounced herself sufficiently well to go out. She felt fearfully low and depressed —almost tempted to wonder why life had been given to her. The first thing that greeted her eyes upon the breakfast-table was a letter from her father, consenting to give the post of gamekeeper to Dick Burns. The intelligence cheered her so much, that she could scarcely wait until she arrived in Byron's Court. All the way there, she was picturing Mary's delight at the prospect of living in such a home as she would describe to her—its walls covered with roses, and the sea before it, down below the cliffs.

She went quickly through the narrow court, where, at one door and another, through a window here and a window there, friendly faces peeped, and kindly voices called, "Good day, Miss Seymour." She tapped at No. 8. Richard answered her. His look frightened her—it was so dejected. There was an empty grate; a few unwashed pots

on the round table; and on the bed in the corner Mary was lying delirious.

"How is this?" she asked.

"Hoo wur took wi' th' fayver on Friday," he said.

"And who has attended to her?"

"My sen," he answered with a sigh. "Th' neighbors han as mich as they can do for t' fettle for theirsels."

"But you don't seem to have anything. Why did you not send to my brother?"

"I could na think on't. Ye've done so mich."

"My dear fellow," she said, "you have shown a Lancashire pride and independence greater than your faith in us, more than was due in love to her."

She gave him some money, and very soon there were coals and food in the cottage. Margaret herself made the fire, put on the kettle, changed Mary's linen, washed her face and hands in vinegar and water, and totally altered the room's aspect. No sister of charity ever did more with less of self-righteousness. Mary was so soothed that she sank into a dose. Margaret whispered her good news to Dick. He could not comprehend her meaning at first; but she described his future home, and then, to her alarm, he burst into loud sobs.

"Hoo'll ne'er see it, hoo'll ne'er see it," he said; "an' eh, how hoo has pined for a sight o' th' green fields sin' th' little 'un wur buried! Mary, my owd lass, thae mun mend! Thae munna dee!"

If the agony of entreaty could have restored her, his voice would have done. All Dick's early love for the girl-mother of the "little 'un" on whose grave daisies had blossomed through many long years flowed back in a strong tide. Mary seemed so near the babe now, that she was doubly dear to him, who had never, in all their life of trial and privation, given her "fou' words."

Ah, the love that stands true to its poetry, through

the ordeal of poverty, and comes forth unscathed, is the grand love after all! Poor Dick's sentences were not framed according to Mr. Murray's rules; his dialect was as broad as his garments were coarse, but his tones were modulated by tenderness, and his horny hand was laid on the wife's head as gently as if it had been the soft, pink palm of a lady.

Margaret's eyes filled with tears. She hesitated a moment before she spoke; she was such a timid teacher —never bold, but when her help was needed; she had only once prayed in all her visits, and that had been when she found a very young mother alone, crying over her dead baby. She had knelt then, and with her hand in that heart-broken girl's, she had prayed; she was very nervous now; she took from her pocket her little Bible. "Listen, Richard," she said, "'And they brought their sick unto Him, and He healed them.' That physician is still to be found. Let us take Mary to Him." She knelt down, he followed her example, and then she pleaded for the life that seemed so near its end—pleaded in trembling tones, but with firm faith and strong fervor.

"God A'mighty mun reward yo', Miss Saymoor," said Dick; "He canna send sorrow to such as yo', for you done nowt, but what th' angels 'ull tell on wi' pride."

She gave him no reply. As she drove home she thought how far from the truth his words were.

Edward had not arrived when she got to Edgware Street. Her head ached fearfully, she was resting on the couch when he came in. "It is nothing," she said cheerfully, in answer to his look, "only a little pain," pointing to her temples. She saw he looked very tired and troubled, but asked no questions; when they went into the library she turned the gas higher and stirred the fire to a bright blaze.

Whilst she was doing that, Edward noticed for the first

"Changed, Edward!"

"Yes, dear. I don't know when I heard your old merrie laugh; why, the ring has gone out of your voice even. I am frightened for what our father and mother will say, darling; they will look reproachfully at me."

"No, no, Edward." She hid her face on his arm; and then, with a face so ghastly white, so full of wild entreaty, that he was struck dumb, she said, "Edward, don't send me home. I cannot, cannot go to Bronwylfa. Not yet, not yet! Not whilst—I mean that lonely sea-shore and the quiet of home would drive me mad. I must have work, Edward; don't you help to kill me."

His emotion was so great, it was with difficulty he could speak; but her passionate quick words alarmed him.

"Maggie, Maggie, my poor love. Be calm, darling. See, I will not send you there. Don't look so, dear, or I shall fancy terrible things. Do you feel ill? or have you some trouble?"

"Trouble, Edward!" She smiled bitterly, as he had never seen her smile before. "Yes, we must all have trouble. I have my share, not more. I have felt weak lately, and am nervous. Forget my foolish words, only don't send me home."

He was not satisfied, but answered cheerfully, "I pray God to deal gently with your heart, and to hide you, in every bitter trial, under the shadow of his wing. There is no variableness in Him."

"No, none!"

His words brought her trouble before her most vividly. She lay wakeful through the night, thinking of the past. Her love once given was given for ever. It was no unworthy affection. That thought consoled her; although she knew that as it had been wholly her own in the days gone, so the pain, the sorrow, and the hopelessness would be hers in the future, wholly and alone.

She could pray that he might be happy, who had unwittingly wronged her. And as she could not recal the past, she was content to suffer if, without sin, she might love on. It was that dread of sin that was crushing Margaret to the earth, because she could not tear from her heart the forbidden love.

Edward sat up until very late. His thoughts wandered through the whole community of human beings, and he started back from the pictures of misery which crowded into his brain. Some prosperous, with a skeleton at their feast that poisoned every joy. Others happy in their homes, with one black sheep in the flock, whose name was never uttered in the household, or only in a whisper by those who had been his playmates in the nursery, lest the grey-haired father or the saddened mother should hear it. Parents bereaved; children orphaned, yea forsaken. Merchants ruined; the industrious beggared; starving thousands; guilty millions. What a world of misery! Life was crowded with trouble. Its only hope was Christ, and Him they rejected!

He sat thinking and thinking, forgetful of time; but his saddest thought of all was, that dark shadows had so soon began to lengthen on his sister's path. And it was in vain that he tried to guess the cause.

CHAPTER VII.

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW.

ÉRASTE.— . . . mon amour extrême
D'un rien se fait un crime envers celle que j'aime.
LA MONTAGNE.—Si ce parfait amour, que vous prouvez si bien,
Se fait vers votre objet un grand crime de rien,
Ce que son cœur pour vous sent de feux légitimes,
En revanche, lui fait un rien de tous vos crimes.
ÉRASTE—Mais, tout de bon, crois-tu que je sois d'elle aimé?
MOLIÈRE.—*Les Facheux.*

THE 30th of September was a day of great rejoicing at Longleat. The Earl was bringing home his bride; since early morning the old church bells had been ringing. The picturesque village was gay with arches and flags; within the hall there was excitement and joy. The Dowager Countess passed from room to room to see that nothing had been omitted in the really perfect preparations. She was superintending the arrangement of some vases filled with flowers, when a card was brought to her. It was the Rev. Edward Seymour's.

"I am rejoiced to see you, Mr. Edward," she said, as she entered the library, speaking with more heartiness than she usually did.

"Your Ladyship is very kind," he replied, "I have only just discovered that the Earl is returning to Longleat to-day. I should not——"

"You must not say more, Mr. Edward," said the Countess, interrupting him; "this is a white day in my life, and no one could be more welcome to share in its happiness than Margaret's brother—unless I except Margaret herself," she added, with a smile.

"I sincerely trust the white days may run through all your life, my Lady," he answered gently. And then he explained that he had come to Longleat with the hope of inducing the Earl, as a large owner of property in Manchester, to exert his influence in promoting a more satisfactory feeling between the mill-owners and their employés.

The Countess listened with interest to his reports of the existing distress, and to his proposed remedies. The conversation beguiled the waiting hours which otherwise would have run on "broken wheels."

At four o'clock such a merrie peal of bells rang on the still air that the household knew the carriage had passed through the gates. The Countess stood in the great entrance waiting to receive them. Edward was a little behind her. The hall was lined with eager servants; on the lawns below the terraces were the yeomanry, and most of the tenants on the Longleat estates. It was a scene for a painter, was that coming home. As Helena stood on its threshold, the mellow gold of the autumn sun shone upon her, and the breeze stirred the flag in the tower above her; and amid the ringing cheers of the crowd she heard the loving whisper, "Welcome, my daughter!" from the only mother she had ever known.

She had looked for nothing more than quiet lawns, and lonely park lands, with perhaps a kindly greeting from the Countess. This reception was almost more than she could bear. There was such wealth of love in it, such tenderness, that her eyes were full of tears, though she acknowledged with inimitable grace the greetings of the crowd.

Those people never forgot her as she looked then; and there was one gazing upon her wonderful loveliness, who remembered that coming home when the remembrance brought keener pain for the contrast of the hour. Was the prescient vision given to the earnest soul of Edward Seymour, that a shadow so suddenly veiled the brightness of the scene and saddened his heart; or that a fragment of the tenderest *In Memoriam* that was ever sung ran through his thoughts as he clasped the Earl's hand, "Methinks my friend is richly shrined. But I shall pass; my work will fail?" He roused himself with a feeling of annoyance at his unaccountable sadness, and at the same moment Helena turned to him with a smile, and a graceful greeting.

The Dowager herself conducted the young Countess to her apartments. Helena walked beside her with a shy dignity that vanished in a moment, however, when she entered her dressing-room, for there stood Elspie. Helena threw herself upon her breast with a cry of delight.

"Bairnie, the Laird be thankit," said Elspie, tears welling to her eyes, "it's a braw welcome ye hae had. Blessin's on your sweet bit bonnie face. Ye hae grown mair lovely than the last rose upo' the bough."

The Dowager stood aside impressed by Helena's impassioned love.

"Nursie, have you missed me?" she asked, showering kisses on her face.

"Missed ye! Sud I miss the morn-licht, lammie! It has seemed ower lang sin the month o' roses died. A' the simmer faded when auld Elspie's swallow winged awa'."

There was exquisite pathos in Elspie's voice; then, in a tone of pleading wistfulness, as if she feared to claim her right to her nursling, yet could not resign her, she added, "It was a' the leddy's gude heart that ca'ed me hither—I'm meanin' the mither o' the Earl."

Helena raised her head, and said artlessly, "I do so thank you, Lady Cranford."

"Do you? Then will you not give me my reward, my dear?" She smiled at the pretty look of wonder in Helena's eyes; a flash of intelligence shot into Elspie's. There was silence for a while.

"Leddy," she said softly, "in my ain countra we hae a sayin', 'The stown birdlin' soon forgets the nest-cry.' Ye mind the bairn was lang mitherless." She laid her trembling hand on her darling's head.

It was almost like a coo, so tender was Helena's whispered answer, "Mother."

Lady Cranford held her to her heart. "God bless you, my child; in all your life to come, you never can be motherless again, until God makes you so."

This was Helena's entrance to her new life.

Dinner had ended, and they were all chatting merrily at dessert, when a card was brought to the Earl. He flushed to his temples, and with an incoherent, hasty apology, he left the room.

Helena looked in dismay at Lady Cranford.

"This is too bad, dear, is it not?" she said. "I should not wonder if it were some business connected with Manchester, Mr. Edward, for he has had some annoying letters lately, he tells me, from his agents, concerning his property there."

Helena listened in surprise. "I did not know that Longleat had any property in Manchester," she said.

"Did you not? he has a great deal, and perhaps I ought not to wish that he did not possess it, as I was tempted just now, seeing that we are indebted to that fact for the presence of our guest."

Edward explained to the young Countess the purpose of his visit, and that naturally led to a talk about Mar-

garet's stay in Manchester. Helena had occasion to notice how much the Dowager liked her.

An hour passed before the Earl joined them in the drawing-room; his wife was at the piano; she left off playing, and asked what had kept him so long?

"Nothing," he said, curtly, throwing himself down in an easy-chair, as if very tired, and smiling at her.

"Was it Manchester, Longleat?" his mother asked.

There was just an instant's hesitation before he answered, "Yes."

Then he plunged eagerly into a conversation with Edward, which lasted so long, and was so uninteresting to the young Countess, that she sat in one of the windows, looking out on the park in the moonlight, until Margaret's name arrested her attention, and she heard her husband say—

"Such a character as your sister, I never knew."

She went to his side. "Who was it that came to see you?" she said.

He flushed again, and answered so constrainedly and coldly, that they all felt more or less uncomfortable, especially Helena, who soon retired, being greatly fatigued.

Somehow the day had not ended well, and Helena felt, as if, without at all knowing why, her old school-fellow Margaret Seymour, had been the cause, or as if she had somehow come between her and her husband. Cranford's tone had been so different when speaking of Margaret from that in which he had used in speaking to herself a moment after, she could not understand it.

She was asleep when some one kissed her, and whispered, "Heaven bless my darling." She opened her eyes, Lord Cranford was bending over her. She smiled then, and went to sleep happily.

The Earl's expression was not the same now that he

was alone; he looked worn and anxious. "God alone knows how this will end," he said to himself, as he went to his dressing-room; "but come what may, she is mine, and I will shield her." He had kissed away a tear from his darling's eye lash while she slept.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHILDREN'S FESTIVAL.

Who is Silvia? What is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise as free,
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admired be.

Is she kind, as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness;
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness:
And, being helped, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing,
Upon the dull earth dwelling:
To her let us garlands bring.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

THE 3rd of October came, and at nine o'clock such a mist filled the village of Longleat, that every child in it was full of dismay. Little noses—by no means classic at any time—were flattened against the lattices, as their owners tried to see some signs of clearance; but in vain. Passers-by loomed like giants through the dense white fog.

Farmer Mallinson, a most enthusiastic admirer of the bride on the 30th—a north-country man, who had some

years ago left one of the Earl's farms on the borders of Lancashire, at the Earl's own recommendation, to rent this large one in the south, sat by the wide chimney hearth, dispensing comforting bits of bacon to his little Lucy, a cherub of five, the pet of Lady Cranford's school. There was an ominous look on her face, which the farmer didn't at all like. At last she got up from her little chair and ran to the door, that happened to be open for a moment.

"Moser," she called in that half-tearful, half-sobbing tone which little children always have in trouble, "I sink de sky has tumbled."

"Bless the little wench!" said her mother, "hoo's as old-fashioned as thee, or me, feyther; th' sky tumbled!" Mrs. Mallinson finished a cup of tea, for they were breakfasting at an unprecedented late hour for some reason, between alternate sips and "humphs!"

The farmer's broad shoulders shook with laughs.

"Well, that's a good 'un, too! Come here, little wench," he called to Lucy, holding a tasty bit, at the end of his huge clasp-knife, with which he would eat his bacon, though there was an abundant supply, as his wife often told him, "both o' cuttlery an' crockery."

Lucy, however, had arrived at that deplorable state of woe (to borrow from Charles Lamb), "in which even roast pig ceases to be a solace," and she burst into a passionate cry.

"Nay, nay, my little lass," said the farmer in dismay, "thae moant fret; th' sun's a top o' th' sky somewheer, thae mun wait a bit."

"Did iver h'onybody y'ear such a child!" said her mother; "hoo's bin' agate o' mitherin' sin' dayleet. Lucy, come to mother; hie thee, wench! come, an' she'll make thee pretty to goo an' see nice ladies."

The child stood still crying.

"Dear 'art! if th' fog does na tak' up, hoo'll be welly

frightenin' th' beästs i' th' field. See, my pretty, here's some cream out of mother's own saucer."

The farmer was still trying to wheedle, and the mother to coax, when a tap was heard at the door, followed in an instant by the entrance of a little girl, apparently about nine or ten. She was very lame and walked with crutches. Her face was delicately fair and sweet-looking; but it wore that touching expression of patient suffering so often written on the faces of young children inured almost to pain.

"Eh, Lucy, here's little Mary!" said Mrs. Mallinson briskly, much relieved in her mind, for the lame child had great influence over this young autocrat. She drew out an arm-chair for the little girl. Lucy ran at once to her, and laid her head upon her lap.

Mary looked at Mrs. Mallinson, and said with pretty gentleness—

"I thought she would be frettin', ma'am, but grandfather says it's only the pride of the morning." Then she laughed—a musical laugh, that was very sweet; but soon gone—you missed something when it ended.

"You hear *that*, Lucy, now," said her mother, passing to and from her dairy, to get a fresh-laid egg, and some better cream for the frail little comforter's breakfast—with true northern hospitality, not waiting to ask if she had already had it.

"Pride o' th' mornin', eh," said the farmer, lighting his pipe, and drawing Lucy between his knees, as he stroked every atom of curl out of her locks. "Pride o' th' mornin', eh, Meary; th' little wench says as th' sky's tumbled;" and again he relapsed into his guttural roar, in which Mary's silvery merriment blended, like the liquid music of a harp with that of a big drum.

"How's gronfeyther, my lassie?" he asked, after having coughed himself purple—between swallowing some

smoke and laughing—until his wife thumped him on the back to bring, as she expressed it, "his reet color again."

"He is pretty well, sir, thank you," she said, smoothing Lucy's hair, who had returned to her side during this apoplectic scene. "My Lady has sent him some soup and wine; they have strengthened him. And do you know, sir," she went on more rapidly, her color rising, "the beautiful lady is so wishful for him to be at the dinner to-morrow, because he is the oldest villager, that she is going to send a pony-gig for him, for you know grandfather is *very* old, sir."

"Well, if iver," said Mrs. Mallinson, standing at the dairy door; "well, if iver! it's weel worth poor folk havin' th' rheumatics, if it wur only to show th' kindness o' th' quality."

"Yes," said Mary, "and the beautiful lady came yesterday herself to see grandfather; and oh, ma'am, she *did* look pretty, and she spoke so kindly!" Mary's face flushed, and her eye sparkled.

"Aw seed her ridin' o' hoss-back, as aw wur i' th' meady," said the farmer, "and aw thowt as hoo wur a dainty bit; an' th' Earl looked as if he thowt it too. Ay, an' hoo ca'ed, did hoo?—weel it wur to her credit."

"That it wur," said his wife, heartily; "an' folk may say'en what they'n a' mind abaät her feyther; an' th' stock as childre came fro'—an' runnin' i' th' blood—an' a deal o' talk o' that sort; but I dunnot know as folk are ony better for havin' water i' their veins i'stead—though some are hallus welly agate o' callin' them as 'han getten blood;' but I'd rayther ha' it, nur be 'bout, and wakely as I han bin' iver sin Lucy theer wur born—an' that's six 'ear turn o' th' winter."

"Ay, ay, missus," said the farmer, knocking the ashes from his pipe, and crossing his comfortably gaitered calves, "yo han spoken reet theer. Th' folk as is 'allus agate o' threäpin' abaät quality are o' that sooärt,—aw'll be danged if

they are na!—as is allus i' trouble wi' their cattle gettin i' th' pund,—an' their fences gieën way, an' their crops noan coomin' up reet. Talk o' *their'n* standin' yaller i' th' ear, an' cracklin' when th' 'arvest moon shines o'er th' lond top o' th' trees! be far to 'em! Aw ne'er yet seed th' wheät a' thatten belungin' them as talks agen th' House o' Lords, as is England's pride an' gloory; an' Choorch an' Staäte, as is eawr bullark o' liberty! They're o' th' same breed as talks agen 'blood.' Aw'd like fort' see God A'moighty on th' soide o' sich! It's welly fit for t' mak' him pour i' 'arvest time till o' th' clargy's black i' th' face wi' prayin' for fair weather, to say nowt abaät th' clerk as gets his wage for th' amens—an' a very 'sponsible mon th' clerk is!" added Mr. Mallinson, after a series of pulls. "If th' folk as talk agen blood wur owt like th' h'Earl an' his mother, they'd be a deal better nur they are, to my thinkin'. An' as for th' pratty bride's feyther: aw dunnot know as he e'er harmed a fleä; an' that's moar nur ivery mon can say. It wur but yester e'en as aw heered Mester Hamilton say'en at th' Churchwarden's vestry, as he could na' shom for t' goo and ax him for a 'scription toward repairs i' th' church, for he'd gen so mich a'ready; an' aw known as he's sent a matter of a hunderd to Lancashire, for th' mill-hands theer (jerking his thumb over his shoulder as if Cottonopolis lay in his wife's cool dairy). But say, aw dunnot know what some folk wanten, except to han o' th' mate they tak' gieën 'em, an' be paid fur ·atin' it i' th' bargin. If th' General's wife has na lived wi' him, hoo met be one o' them sooärt as canna live peaceably wi' theirsels—let alone wi' other folk, to say nowt abaät th' husband—as is nowt but a flyin' post for t' run agen wi' some women."

"Ay, an' there's a deal on 'em," interposed Mrs. Mallinson, taking Lucy on her lap. "I know em; dunnot I, indeed! If it's weshin'-day, they wouldna tak' time to get a bit o' gradely wittle—if they wur clemmin'

for't, though it goes agen 'em theirsels; an' if its cleanin'-up time, they tak' a pride i' puttin' pattins on, an' makin' a clatter, an' turnin' ivery cheer i' th' house bottom up-'ards, so that th' mon canna sit if it wur iver so! I cannot abide such like. It's o' awkerdness." And she trotted the knee on which Lucy sat to "Bambury Cross" with such gusto, that the child must have been sick but for being stomach proof.

"Didn't the beautiful lady's mother live with her?" asked Mary, her brown eyes dilating.

The farmer shook his head.

"No, little wench. Some said as hoo wur dead (aw've heered it said sin' aw coom); but how-shusiver that may be, her and him wur parted afore th' time as th' Prayer-book counts on."

"Ay, that's th' way wi' a deal o' quality," remarked Mrs. Mallinson, with a solemn shake of her head. "I sometimes think as th' Lord makes it up to common folk i' th' matter o' love. There's no partin's 'mong farmers, at ony rate afore th' time."

"Nay, thae'd tak' care o' that," said Mr. Mallinson, slily, winking at nothing in particular but a very fine ham among the rafters.

"Weel, an' if I did tak' care o' that," retorted his wife, "it 'ud only be for t' save thee a journey; for I could na geet far afore thae'd be settin' thee best leg foremost at after me."

The farmer chuckled, and glanced at Mary. Like most good husbands, he was rather proud than otherwise of his wife's quick wit. But the little girl heard nothing of what was passing. She looked into the fire long and earnestly, for she, too, had never known her mother; and she was wondering whether it was better to know that that mother was in Heaven, and to be able to see her grave every Sunday when she went to church, or to know that

she was living somewhere, and not be able to see her. She had not solved the problem when Mr. Mallinson spoke to her. She started so violently that her cup fell and broke.

"Theer," said the farmer, good-humouredly; "thae's bin an' done it neaw!"

Both Mary and Mrs. Mallinson stared in astonishment.

"Weel, Mary, I niver know'd you do such a thing afore," she said. "Nay, nay, lassie, dunnot mind. It's only yer own chaney cup an' saucer, as yo han had iver sin' yo geet agate o' comin'. I'll piece it wi' egg, an' it 'ull look as weel as iver on th' rack. Was it a pain, Mary?" she asked tenderly, after a look at her face.

"It was beating here," said the child, laying her hand upon her heart, "and I was a little frightened. It was my fault."

The farmer and his wife exchanged glances. Mrs. Mallinson would insist on her taking "just another cup for better luck."

"You are goin' to th' park?" she said, inquiringly.

"Oh, yes; my Lady said I might lie down when I was tired. I have been there lately sewing. I brought this to let you see," she added timidly. "I worked it at home."

Mrs. Mallinson showed great interest in the paper parcel; but she lifted her hands, exclaiming, "I niver!" when she saw the contents.

It was a handkerchief of finest cambric, most delicately embroidered with a border of vine-leaves. At one corner, in a wreath of flowers, were the armorial bearings of the Earl. It certainly was an exquisite specimen of needlework. Poor little Mary's want of strength seemed to have been atoned for by her delicacy of touch and skill. Twelve months ago, she commenced to work this handkerchief, with the view of purchasing some red flannel shirts for her grandfather; but, when the border was completed, they heard of the Earl's coming marriage, and both she

and her grandfather thought it would be a simple proof of their gratitude for kindness if she presented it to the bride. The armorial bearings were copied by Mr. Hamilton from the tablet in the church, and reduced by little Mary to the dimensions of the handkerchief.

Mrs. Mallinson gloated over the fabric.

"A bit o' fine needlework is good for sore eyes i' these days," she said to her husband. "There's ne'er a lass as knows how for t' mend a stockin', let alone fine work as this. Eh! it wur different i' my time! When I wur a girl, it wur a part o' eddication wur puttin' patches on, an' toein' stockin's, an' runnin' th' heels; but times is altered sin' my day. An' I reckon aw'st be havin' th' little wench turnin' her nose up at th' needle i' a bit; but mother 'ull have to be firm—hoo will!"

She shook her head contemplatively; but the tone was too loving, the smile too fond, for the rosy-cheeked child, who was stuffing herself with bread and butter, to need fear very much.

"But what dun yo ca' this? Aw canna chrissen it," said Mr. Mallinson, holding it in his great palm as if it were a spider's web.

"Tak' care! tak' care!" exclaimed his wife. "A breath 'ud send it up th' flue. Ca' it?—a handkercher, of coärse. Lucy, pet, run and fetch feyther's glasses, there's a good little wench. Well, Mary, I will say this—I ne'er seed nowt so fine!"

"A handkercher!" echoed the farmer. "Why——" He scratched his head, at a loss for words.

"It is for the beautiful lady," said Mary. "Will she like it?"

"I dunnot know as hoo can help," said Mrs. Mallinson, quickly; "an' I am fain as yo han done it."

"Ay," said the farmer, still looking at the frail fabric with considerable wonder. "Ay, an' so am aw, if th'

attention 'ull please th' Earl; for aw will say this, that a landlord as gi'es every mon on his estate th' same right to shoot a bit of a hare, or a flyin' brid, as he'd want hissel, if God A'moighty had made him a farmer i'stead of a h'Earl, is worthy h'onythin'—for yo known, Meary," he went on with confidence, being more sure of his ground than when discussing the handkerchief, "he winna keep a gamekeeper, except just for t' see as things is i' order; an' then he does na' ca' 'em gamekeepers—it's allus 'Beatson' or 'Jackson, down at th' Lodge,' yo known, if he's aught for t' say on 'em; an' that's bein' a Lord i' style, aw ca' it. An' what's th' consequence? There's niver a mon i' th' parish as 'ud break a twig i' his fences, or fire a gun when th' Earl's here i' shootin'-times—tho' he does na do so mich at it hissel after a'. He's noan mich for t' brag on i' th' spooärtin' line."

"Eh, Lucy, little wench," said her mother, "th' sky's getten up agen!"

Sure enough, the mist was getting thinner as sunshine glimmered; there was the promise of a clearance.

"Grandfather spoke true," said Mary, quietly, reaching her crutches. "She will be all right now, ma'am, and I will look after her at dinner."

"And I'm bringing your gronfeyther his bit at noon," said Mrs. Mallinson. "Nay, nay; dunnot thank me for th' slice o' meat an' bit o' puddin'—what is it? An' yo lookin' after th' little wench, too! I'll lay a guinea hoo'd be for chokin' hersel if yo did na tak' care on her. Childre will eat a' thatten, they met think th' house 'ud tak' fire afore they could get their bellies filled."

She stood at the door, holding the little one by the hand, as they watched the lame child down the garden until she was lost in the white mist. There was a sad look on Mrs. Mallinson's motherly face, for she still heard the crutches knock upon the ground when she turned in with

her bairn; and there was more than usual lovingness in her words to Lucy—as if she had been wondering what she would feel, were that sturdy little one to be frail, like Mary, who was the only comfort left to her old grandfather in his last days.

Never was promise of sunshine so welcome. In every cottage there had been cross children, and petting, angry, coaxing, or scolding mothers, according to the temperament of the matron.

In the Hall one at least was gladdened: that was the young Countess. Helena came down early, and just at the time when Lucy had been crying, if the truth must be told, she had been almost inclined to do the same herself. When Lord Cranford entered the breakfast-room, he found her leaning through the open window, her bare head enveloped in mist.

"Naughty child!" he said, drawing her back. "What on earth are you doing this for?"

"Oh, Longleat, is it not too bad! how will those children get here? Poor little things!"

There was every sign of a pout on those beautiful lips.

"My dear, there will be nothing but sunshine soon," said Cranford. "Mother," as the Dowager entered the room, "here is your daughter in trouble about the fog."

Lady Cranford smiled as she kissed Helena.

"Don't fear, dear," she responded in her usually quiet manner, "it will clear; but what says Elspie? The Scotch are always weather-wise."

Away ran Helena, her husband's laugh winging after her.

"I must have my coffee," he said to his mother; "I am not proof against that being cold, whatever Helena may be."

"I never met with such a loving nature," answered the Dowager, as she filled his cup; "it is all those wonderful children for whose pleasure she cares."

Helena had rushed into Elspie's room. "Nurse, is it going to be fog all day? Oh, I am so vexed." She stamped her foot impatiently.

"Whisht, bairn, whisht!" said Elspie, softly. "It wull be nane a fog the day; it's nae mair than the snood o' autumn nicht laft behint i' his flicht before the morn. Ye'll see hoo the sun wull tak' up ivery fauld, till the grand hills an' valleys will stan' clear ane by ane. It's the Laird's ain wark, the blindin' mist an' the clear shine, an' the stamp o' your fute was but a flyte anent Him. Ye luve the wee bit bairnies. It wull be a braw day for Elspie, when she sees ye the mither o' your ain."

Helena turned scarlet and ran back to the breakfast-room.

"What says the sibyl?" asked Lord Cranford.

"Where did you gather those roses?" asked his mother.

The roses bloomed more brilliantly for the sunshine of the love that questioned.

Elspie proved right. At two o'clock, when the procession of children entered the park, there was not a fold of mist to be gathered from beneath the shadow of a tree. The young Countess did not know how pretty she looked as she walked down the slopes to meet them, nor how her husband's eye followed her as she fluttered to and fro amid their ranks, like a white-winged bird. Her gentle kindness won the hearts of the little ones; but to Mary she seemed an angel. She gave her handkerchief with modest grace. The surprise of the Dowager, and the delight of the Countess seemed to embarrass her; the Earl afterwards went to the child himself; he noticed that she seemed tired and feverish. He carried her to a couch in a

quiet room, and whispered, "I don't know what to say to little Mary, for her beautiful gift to the Countess."

Mary took his hand, and kissed it, then turned aside her head, and closed her eyes as if she were very weary.

Helena came in. At the sound of her step Mary's color rose; she looked round, and saw the "beautiful lady" kneeling beside her; her white dress falling in soft folds around her, and her golden hair streaming back from her lovely face.

"Truly she was a fair vision to the child, as with her husband's hand resting upon her head, she again thanked her.

"I prize it so much, Mary," she said, "that when I die I shall leave it to some one who will care for it for the sake of the dear little worker."

The hand that held the gift clasped the hand that gave, and the fair faces of the two children—for such they both seemed—were close together.

Mary's lip quivered; but she checked her emotion as one accustomed to self-control.

"Beautiful lady," she said, "I am glad you will think of me when it has pleased God to take me from my pain. I shall look so much for you in heaven."

Her voice was very earnest, and the pupils of her eyes grew large with excitement.

"I will try to meet you there, Mary," Helena whispered softly.

Types of two classes, far apart, were the Countess and the cottage child. The Earl, as he stood by in silence, contrasted their lives. To his eye all the brightness rested on the one, all the shadow on the other.

But ah, who can tell the ending of a day at dawn!

Nine o'clock came. Fathers who had come to fetch their little ones, stood among the servants at the end of the Hall. They had been watching the last dance. On

the dais were the Earl and Countess, the Dowager and Mr. Hamilton. The children were resting below before going. The Rector rose, and coming forward, said—

"I am quite sure, dear little ones, that this most happy day will never be forgotten by you. The Countess has been like a good fairy, dispensing gifts of pleasure at every wave of her wand. When we knew that she was coming to live amongst us at Longleat—the wife of our own Earl—we thought to pay our tribute—to give her a hearty, respectful, and most loving welcome; but her gifts to us—so rich in grace—have beggared ours. We have been left dependants upon her bounty, for the youthful Lady of Longleat has one jewel more beautiful than any dazzling gem she wears—a true and loving heart! May God bless our bride. May no day ever dawn when she will look upon us, her new friends, and upon this her new home, with any feeling save that of deep affection. Now I want you to sing to her your greeting song."

It was one of the old Norwegian ballads, that come to us with quaint pathos. Its refrain, "Sad Voices from the Sea," died away among the garlands and the flowers, then there was a deep hush.

The Earl turned to Helena. She was very pale; suddenly to his surprise, before he could rise to respond for her, she left her seat, and advanced to the edge of the dais. For a moment she stood silent, then her lips—those trembling lips—parted. She threw back her head, her eyes gathered deeper darkness in her intense feeling; she looked, in her snowy dress, with her white arms and white face, like some statue in which life had just been breathed.

"Children," she said in a clear sweet voice, that was heard in every part of the immense hall, "I thank you for your welcome. Mr. Hamilton has said that my kindness beggared yours, but Mr. Hamilton did not know what

your music was to me. If you have been happy, I have been happier, and the memory of this day will never die. I love little children. It will be one of the greatest joys in my new life to care for you all in your homes and in your school ; and so as I grow older, and you grow older, there will be a close bond between us that will not be broken, even when the time comes for you to leave our little village, and go out into the world. I hope you will then, and through all your future lives, look back to this day as the first link of a long bright chain of days that bound your hearts to your good Earl's bride who loved you."

There was the deepest silence as Helena returned to her seat. The Earl had covered his eyes with his hand, his mother was gazing at Helena with a look of intense love. Many a "God bless her!" was whispered in the group at the end of the Hall. Little Mary sat with crimson cheeks, and burning eyes that were fastened on the fair speaker. Then Farmer Mallinson, forgetful of everything save his enthusiastic admiration, cried, "Three cheers for the bonniest bride ever seen," and in another moment the old Hall rang with their stentorian voices. It was perhaps well for the Earl, that this startling result should have followed, for his emotion was very deep. Years after, he looked back, and many of those children looked back to this day, with feelings of which the Countess little dreamed when she spoke. Their shadow seemed to fall upon him now.

Mary was the last to leave. Helena herself warmly wrapped her up, and the Earl placed her in the carriage in which she was sent home.

The last thing the child felt was the soft kiss of the beautiful lady. After that she was in dreamland ; everything seem unreal.

Soon every light was extinguished in the village.

In the Hall, darkness reigned, excepting in Helena's own apartments.

She was sitting on a stool at her husband's feet, wrapped in a loose silken dressing-gown, her beautiful hair flowing over her shoulders, like a sun-lit cloud. She had dismissed her maid; she wanted to talk to the Earl. They talked of the past, of the time when they first met, and of many happy meetings since, down to this happier *now*.

"We can go no farther, Cranford."

"No farther, my darling."

She leaned her chin upon her hand, and looked musingly at the fire.

"I wonder what is yet to be."

"How, dear!—what do you mean?"

"I scarcely know, Longleat. I feel strangely happy—and yet—sometimes the sunset sky is brightest before the darkest night."

"Foolish child! No night *can* be dark with your love, little one."

"What would it be without it?"

"I cannot picture that. It would be terrible. My life would be a waste."

He kissed her. Soon they, like the world, were at rest.

CHAPTER IX.

FATHER FELIX AT ROME.

. . . . Be champion of our Church!
Or let the church, our mother, breathe her curse,
A mother's curse, on her revolting son.

KING JOHN.

IT is necessary for the unfolding of this story to recur for a few moments to the 16th of July, the Earl's marriage day.

The beams of an intensely-radiant sun filled a small chamber in the Vatican; the glare was apparently oppressive to a priest, who paced the floor impatiently, as if chafed by his weary waiting. There was neither picture nor book to relieve the tedium of the two solitary hours he had already passed; and the window only looked out, on a square paved court, that contained nothing of interest.

He had just seated himself, as he had done fifty times before, and was unfolding a bundle of papers, when the door opened so noiselessly, that the low voice of a youth in livery startled him. He followed his guide into the Hall of Entrance, and was conducted up the Scala Regia—Bernini's noble monument. At the top of the first flight, he was shown into an apartment where there were several secretaries all busily engaged, but preserving perfect silence. The page placed a chair for him, bowed with reverence, and withdrew. Half an hour passed. Then

the priest rose, and went to the window. It commanded a beautiful view of hills, white villas, and distant vineyards—all bathed in the purple baptism of the hour, and blazing in the reflected fires of high heaven.

He stood so still—so very still—that more than one of the secretaries looked at him in surprise. Presently the faint tinkle of a bell was heard, and in two or three moments the priest knelt in the presence of his Holiness.

It was an interview of an entirely private and informal character; more especially granted, just now, by reason of its urgency, through the influence of the Pope's favorite —the Abbé Baroccio—as the Pontiff was an invalid.

Perhaps that slight indisposition might account for the seeming impatience with which Peter's successor gave the benediction—if haste might express that spirit.

The priest was desired to seat himself before a small table, on which were placed a hand-bell, a massive bronze inkstand, and some sweet lemons.

The conversation was in Italian; but for the benefit of the reader who does not understand that sweetest of all languages, and who may not have an interpreter at hand, it will be convenient to report it in English. The priest unfolded his papers, and in distinct low tones told something of his tale. Then he placed the MSS. in the hand of the Pope, who read every line carefully, making notes as he went on.

The priest leaned his chin upon his hand, and watched him with a steady, scrutinizing gaze. Not a sound was heard but the rustling of the paper, as page after page was laid aside.

"Felix Domingo," said his Holiness at last, the priest rising instantly, "you have doubtless acted with kindly consideration for the feelings of this heretic Earl, but without due regard to the interests of holy Mother Church, or of this her most unhappy daughter. That indiscretion,

however, we, in our merciful clemency, pass over, for the sake of your tardy remorse; believing it to be not yet too late to remedy the evil done."

Referring to his notes, he said,

"This Stephanie Velasquez Davenant is in the Convent of Our Lady?"

"She is."

"She does not know of your agreement with her husband and this English Earl?"

"No."

"But it is her desire that proceedings in this matter should be stopped?"

"Yes."

"And that, because General Davenant's only daughter visited the convent, and she became strongly interested in the illegitimate beauty?"

"It was so."

"That young lady was then engaged to this Earl, he knowing the stain upon her birth, but not she?"

"Yes."

"He heard of your intention to bring the matter before a state tribunal, visited you, and tried to bribe your silence by an annual payment to your Church?"

"Yes."

"You accepted the compromise—acceded to his conditions?"

"I did."

"Without referring to the wife?"

"Without referring to her."

"General Davenant is a man of great wealth?"

"He is."

"And from a pure love of our Church, from sincere contrition for your unfaithfulness to her interests, you have laid this matter before the Abbé Baroccio, through whom it has been brought to us?"

"I have."

"You witnessed the marriage between Arthur Davenant and Stephanie Velasquez?"

"I did."

"It was legal, though performed alone by a Protestant clergyman, she not having professed herself a Catholic, or taken the Communion in the Church of her parents—deceased?"

"It was so."

"She has returned to her own Church of late years?"

"She has."

"You know one person who was acquainted with her before her marriage?"

"Only one."

"Charles Seymour, Gentleman, of Bronwylfa, Wales?"

"That is his name."

"Your hint to him that she needed friends met with no response?"

"It did not."

"You have left your parish in competent care?"

"I have."

"You, Felix Domingo, will appear in our presence again on Thursday next."

The bell rang, a gentleman appeared, and Father Felix passed through the line of Swiss guards—thankful that the ordeal was past.

Twelve was chiming from the clocks of the churches when the priest once again ascended the Scala Regia, and passed the line of Swiss guards into the Raphael Gallery. He was admitted within the walls of an audience-chamber at once.

"Your instructions are contained in this document," said Pius the Ninth, in the presence of two stern-looking Cardinals and the more kindly Abbé. "You will sail for England at once, and resume your duties as curé of

Bronwylfa—with a careful remembrance of our clemency."

This was said so slowly, so markedly, that Felix Domingo colored like a boy. He left the Vatican with rapid strides, entered his room at the hotel, and then broke the seal of his document. It charged him to keep secret the fact that the discarded wife would not take proceedings in her own cause; to act, by threats well-timed, as if he were her agent; to keep alive the Earl's fears; and to make *the most of his opportunities.*

He embarked in the "Elizabeth," two days later, for England. It was a small trading ship; he was the only passenger. During the voyage, his evident gloom attracted the notice of the captain and crew. One fair night he was pacing the deck, when the former heard him say to himself with great emphasis,

"It shall not be."

From that night they saw little of him.

When he arrived in London, he took the train for Liverpool, and there went on board the Welsh boat; arrived at his own home the following morning at six; told his housekeeper that his presence was required in Rome; packed together a number of papers, which were thrown into the trunk with his clothes; left again in three hours; sailed for Liverpool; and next morning secured a berth in a vessel that was already weighing anchor in the river. Before the day had ended, Father Felix was sailing for the shores of a distant world.

And why?

This last page was the saddest of all in a life that had been most sad. It was the sequel to a story of hopeless love.

Unguessed by Pontiff, Cardinal, or Abbé; undreamed of by the "lay sister" in her convent, Felix Domingo had carried within his own breast a secret that he believed

would drag him to the grave. For the first time, that man, who had come to his prime without one tender emotion agitating the cold depths of his heart—for the first time—he loved.

In that interview in St. Marie's Chapel, Stephanie, with her wondrous eyes shining like stars upon him; with her dark face deep-furrowed by sorrow and care; with her scattered silver hairs that gleamed so strangely in the wealth of raven locks—had exerted a spell over him of which he was not conscious until time had passed. During every interview, his heart was drawn more and more to her. When he missed her from her place before the altar, he felt a vacuum which the duties of his high office could not fill; when he won her to confession, he listened to her voice with greedy anxiety lest he should lose one word; and he could not, dared not trust himself to give the blessing, lest she should guess his love—though he imposed penances which tortured his own soul, and which he in secret shared.

He struggled with this unholy passion; he called to his remembrance her position, and his own vows; spent long nights of vigil; days of fasting and vain prayers; and then—she left Bronwylfa by his own desire. But, as fate ordained, he was called to Italy, and saw her again; then the tide of his hopeless love came rolling over him once more; vows and religion, resolve and reason, were swept aside.

He found her sternly bent on punishing the man who had wronged her in her youth. Once he reminded her that her own hand had sent the story of her death.

She turned upon him fiercely. "I wrote from the tomb in which he sent me to live, and when I waited with a woman's foolish tenderness to see if he would come to my grave, or show some sign of pity for me; no sign was given, he never came. He was content that his purpose

was accomplished. I have lived all these years in silence; but now my hour has come. I will avenge myself."

Never in her early years had Stephanie's weird beauty seemed more grand.

The priest left her, with the blood seething in hot waves round his heart—rushing madly through his veins, and throbbing at his temples; the tempest of her soul passed into his, and he, too, swore that her wrongs should be avenged.

Then followed her interview with Helena. She had rushed from the burial ground to the parlour of the Abbess, and there, seizing his hand, had declared to the bewildered priest that that lovely child should never know sorrow through her. Her spirit softened, she burst into tears, and Felix bent over that long-suffering woman, whom he felt he loved better than his God, and yet, he dared not utter one word, lest that guilty love should leap all barriers, defy all restraint, and reap what? scorn and loathing, or perhaps still worse, a response that would peril her salvation.

Ay, that was it; her salvation was dearer to him than his own.

Her resolution was broken now. She became listless, and would wander for hours in the beautiful gardens of the convent, speaking to no one.

"Melancholy mad," a priest said to Felix with a sneer, and Felix sent the nails into his hands, strongly clenched, lest they should fell his brother to the ground.

In one of her strange moods she formed her wish to see Elspie, of whom Felix had once told her. It was to try Stephanie that the priest threw out those hints, and gave utterance to those innendoes which had so frightened Elspie. But when they left, Stephanie turned upon him fiercely, and bade him, with a strange look, "for ever hold his peace."

Did she guess his secret, that she ruled him so imperiously?

Helena's innocent loveliness, her sad story, her winning trust, had won the scarred heart of that woman, and the secret was safe.

But when Felix saw her broken down, her past wasted, her future hopeless, he could not forgive her destroyer; and so he sailed with him, plotted with himself how to make him suffer, that the thirst of his passionate love might be slaked by the cold waters of revenge.

After then, in the calm discharge of his duties, his sacred allegiance to the Church returned in all its strength; he went to Italy once more, for obedience is the first vow of a Jesuit, and the mandate from the Vatican after he had written was "Come!"

And after all, he saw Stephanie again—white, worn, wasted, with those eyes more splendid than ever star that shone from midnight sky—and he left her purposeless. But when he read that document, given to him sealed, he formed his resolution, and sailed, as we have seen, for the shores of a far-distant land.

"I will found a church there," he pleaded to his own conscience. "I am only fleeing from temptation." So he reasoned, as he stood on the deck of the ship, and watched the shores of England slowly recede from sight, until his ocean home was the only speck upon the waves, and he was alone with his dreary future, and his hopeless love.

The priest who was thus so unceremoniously left with two parishes on his hands, grew uneasy, as time passed and Felix did not return; and when at last a packet arrived for Domingo, sealed with the triple crown, he communicated with his superiors, and there was consternation and dismay.

Then this matter was entrusted to a worthy disciple of Ignatius Loyola, who would act warily, and conceal the

flight of this one witness to the marriage as also the determination of Stephanie. So well did he fulfil his part, that long long enough were the Earl and the General in constant dread of the fall of the sword, that seemed to hang by a hair.

At length a letter came that solved the strange mystery of Domingo's disappearance. "I have gathered a little band here," he wrote to the Abbé, after telling him all his story. "In the depth of a forest we have built a church, in its deep gloom there rises the cross. On the hearts of some, exiled and wearied, there has fallen forgiveness and peace. I am the lone, the unworthy shepherd of these sheep in the wilds; but our Lady has smiled on my mission, for the Saviour has answered my prayers. It may be that my sorrow taught me how to heal wounded lives."

Then followed an entreaty for the blessing of the Pontiff. But instead, there went forth to that desolate man, the thunders of a threatened excommunication if he did not return.

The vessel that carried the curse was lost on its way; and so the priest lived on in his hut, amid the settlers, undisturbed by the vengeance of man, peacefully waiting for death, that seemed so long in its coming.

And Stephanie, urged in vain to take steps for the restoration of her rights, longing for some way by which she could escape from useless persuasions, and perhaps lose the memory of her past, suddenly resolved to join a band of "sisters" who were about to sail for the Australian Continent, to found a mission there.

Thus while the priest was praying and toiling, self-exiled, because of his love for her, every wave that broke on the shore he had reached, was bearing her nearer and nearer, and yet they were distined never to meet!

And the General in his lonely Hall—so desolate in its

magnificence—was often tortured by bitter memories, and like the Earl of Longleat, writhed beneath the burden of the secret—each unconscious of these changes—each dreading what might come. Ah, better for the father if in days gone by he had opened his heart to his child; her love would have soothed his later age. Better for the Earl if he had obeyed the law of truth, and have trusted in the heroism of his lovely wife; have shown to her himself the depths of his great love which, so strangely, so sadly, so thrillingly, were to be revealed to her by another. Ah, how little he thought where or when!

So passed that memorable year—pregnant with events that had their influence upon them all for time and for eternity.

CHAPTER X.

PAST AND PRESENT.

There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray you, love, remember; and there is pansies, that's for thoughts.

OPHELIA.

THE life of the Earl and Countess at Longleat, during the next month, was as quiet and peaceful as happiness could make it. They enjoyed the beautiful autumn; and Helena's love of riding was fully gratified, for they frequently spent hours in the saddle. One glorious morning they made an excursion to St. Hilda's, "just for the sake of that old time," Helena said. They found the ruins looking more beautiful than ever, the dark green ivy contrasted so prettily with the carpet of yellow leaves below, for every tree was almost leafless there; being so elevated, the wind caught them sharply, after the night frosts.

They left the horses at the first field gate, close beside the well-remembered bank, where the Earl came up with Helena after her accident. They went over the grass to the "oratory." Helena ran up the worn steps of the altar, and stood looking on the vale below, one hand shading her eyes from the mellow glare.

"You look like a sibyl," Cranford said, looking up at her, hat in hand. "Come now, read our fates."

She dropped her hand, and looked at him so sadly that he went up to her.

"I don't care to read the future," she said.

She did not answer another word, but went to her boudoir, and there the Earl found her when the time was at hand for their ride. With her sweet temper, no shade of annoyance was left to mar the enjoyment of the hour. As they cantered through the lanes she felt quite satisfied, although she had sufficient of the feminine failing to make her wonder who this constant clerical visitor could be, and perhaps mischievously resolved to find out the mystery by and by.

The Earl followed her up the slight ascent on which stood other portions of St. Hilda's ruin. Below was a winding passage open to the sky, choked with grass, nettles, and fragments of the old arched roof. They went up the stairs which led to a broad, ivy-covered wall, from whence there was a magnificent view. Nature was just the same as when, in the olden time, nuns looked upon that valley from their convent windows, and chanted vespers as the sun went down—just the same; but where were they?

"Cranford," said Helena, after a long silence, "St. Hilda's always makes me sad. Somehow it so reminds me that we 'are all passing away,' and I so dread death. I confess I almost marvel at the strange taste which leads people to visit ruins, and to explore long buried cities. I would even allow Pompeii and Nineveh to rest. Am I not a narrow-minded ignoramus?" she said, laughing; "but I have so much more sympathy with those who travel to discover lands where unheard of tribes dwell. My heart instinctively turns to life; it is a healthy feeling, is it not? And surely there is no selfishness in preferring to spend time, talent, and money in discovering people to benefit them, rather than in bringing to the surface the ashes of the past."

"No selfishness, certainly, Helena; but I do not agree with your feeling. There are sublime teachings in re-treading the footprints of the ages; and many a lesson

may be learned by us from the chronicles of days when there were giants on the earth. Lessons of perseverance—they conceived great projects, and they carried them out, as excavations prove. Lessons of heroism—such as Sparta gave; there was a God-like grandeur in those old times, of which men now rarely dream. We are altogether more puny. What we have gained in finish we have lost in stature, and I think it is good for us sometimes to turn our faces to the long dead past, that we may, as Miguard so gracefully said to his King, 'read the victories written on' its 'brow.' Are not all our noblest monuments of genius either relics of, or imitations of the products of, that past? Do not the architects of our day obey the laws of the graceful Gothic, or the severity of the classic Greek? They do not create now—they reproduce, because they cannot emulate. The races were not in such haste in the olden time. The fever of our forced march had not weakened their giant powers. A man conceived one grand idea, and he was content to consecrate his whole life to its achievement. When it was done, he died with the calm conviction that his work was for the ages; that the echoes of his footsteps would still be heard in the corridors of Time long after his life's task was over. Hence I think we do well to speak of the 'Old Masters.' In Science we do make progress. In Art we turn for our first rudiments to the nations that have obeyed the cyclical law. Their literature adorns our shelves; our literature, as a rule, is too ephemeral. The most lamentable thought which strikes me is, that the stars which flashed such light upon the world are extinguished—perhaps for ever. Who can say? No spirit has come back to tell us of 'that bourne' where we are told the Great Intelligences congregate. Even that revelation we must take on trust. All is dark, we know that they could not carry their works with them."

"No," said Helena, who, with her cheek resting upon her hand, had listened to his low, quiet voice, that sounded harmoniously with the wind that sighed through the ruins: "they are left like the folded grave-clothes in the tomb, Cranford, which the Angel of Mercy has kept for our faith. You surely don't doubt our revelation? And for the sorrow! do you know, I often think that that developes the greatness of some men. By prosperity they are enervated; by adversity they are strengthened."

Ah! Helena did not know how unconsciously she was painting his future!

"How many of the old philosophers, the poets, the sculptors, the painters, were acquainted with grief! And how do we know but that we are indebted to the terrible misery of Cain for the sweet invention of Jubal? Oh, I like to picture the grand old man, with white beard, deep-set eyes, high, calm brow, and firm, sweet mouth—that old 'father of those who handle the harp and the organ!' —I like so to picture him as when teaching the world something of Heaven's harmonies—something of the art whose empire alone extends beyond the grave."

"Who was it that said just now, she did not care for the dead?" said Cranford, laughing.

"Cranford! I did not say that. I said I cared more for life than for exploring old relics, old ruins. But, dear me, what a queer talk we have had! It almost makes me fancy things."

She stood up, steadying herself by the turret, looking over it at the extensive prospect on every side.

"I wonder when we shall see St. Hilda's again, Cranford?"

"As often as you like, dear," he said, throwing down a piece of stone, and peering over to see it fall.

"No; because it is nearing winter now, and then, after Christmas, I suppose it will be that tiresome London!"

"Oh," he said, turning his head; "now I know why my bird was moping this morning. It was because of those directions sent off to Eglinton House yesterday."

She laughed merrily.

"It was nothing of the kind," she said. "Don't be foolish. I can throw a stone farther than you can, Longleat." She took aim, and hit her mark. "Acknowledge yourself defeated, disgraced, dishonored, my belted Earl!"

"No, I won't," he said, catching her in his arms, "you saucy little beauty. And so you pretend not to like London, when you know you are longing to shine, the peerless gem, at Court?"

"I!" she said, looking away, and struggling to escape. "Such pride would ill befit one who, once upon a time—heigho, for the free time!—was forsaken by her lover because she was not—what was it, Longleat?—not rich enough? Oh, no—because she was not nobly born! Was *that* it, my Lord?"

It was all pure mischief, most innocent fun, on her part; but his arms unclasped. She staggered, and would have fallen had he not caught at her dress. His expression frightened her, his face so suddenly paled.

"Why talk such nonsense?" he asked.

She was silent a moment from surprise.

"Cranford, you are variable," she said. "It was mere nonsense. How very little it takes to vex you."

She turned round, descended the steps, and he joined her on the grass below. He took her hand, and drew it upon his arm.

"Child!"

There was almost a tone of anguish in his voice. She looked up, and met his sad smile.

"If you care for me, never repeat those words!"

"Do you love me so, Cranford?"

"Love you!"

There was no need for further words. Ah! what love he had shown by his faithfulness to her! What inherent pride he had trampled upon; what possibilities he had dared; what secret dread he had braved! It had been no slight trial for an Earl of his line to wed one with *such* a stain upon her. But hitherto love had been stronger than pride. Would it be so to the end?

It had been a day of annoyance to Lord Cranford. He had had a visit from the priest, who in a former interview had been bland and yielding. Now he intimated that Mrs. Davenant was disposed to prove her marriage, "not for pecuniary considerations," he said haughtily, but from higher, if selfish, motives. She *might* be dissuaded, he added carelessly, but at any rate he felt bound to tell all the facts to the Earl for whom he felt deep sympathy. All of which was said in a wily manner, that was most irritating to the proud Earl, whose dread of scandal was greater than it had ever been.

"General Davenant is prepared to make most handsome arrangements, if the lady will only state clearly what her wishes are," he said.

"Pardon me my Lord," answered that soft voice again, with a wave of those long thin hands, that seemed all nerves, "but the poor lady is proud—and I don't think that this is exactly a case for mere pecuniary consideration. However, I am prepared to do what I can for you. The idea has occurred to me that she might be induced to take the veil, in which case a handsome dowry would possibly gain for her the position of Abbess—*then*, my Lord, all would be well."

He retired from the interview as bland and secret as the founder of his order. Directly he had left, a note came from the General, stating, that the priest had called upon him the day previous. "Were I to consult my own feelings and judgment," the note said, "I should let them do

their worst—or in fact proclaim my marriage openly, and brave the world—rather than endure this constant dread of what I fear will, after all, prove the inevitable. But my word is given to you. And Helena belongs to you more than to her father now."

There had also been a letter from Glen Ross, who in passing through Manchester, had called upon Edward Seymour. "I found your heroine of Ariadne-association so changed," the letter ran, "that I should have thought, influenced by my former suspicions which I named to you, she was wearing the willow, but for your own assertions. Her appearance pained me. She colored when you were named, and changed the subject. But pray pardon all this. It was a great nuisance my being in France at the time of your marriage; but such accidents will happen in ill-regulated friendships like ours, whose only redeeming point is faithfulness. We have that, old fellow! If I lost you for twenty years, I should expect to find you the same, good, lazy, true-hearted friend you ever were. What different lives we lead! Yours runs in a groove, I dare swear. Mine—well no matter; but there's never a day comes that I don't run out of my course from some cause. A mere freak turns me round to another point of the compass. But all the time, stowed in its case—only looked at on Saints' days—my Divinity is with me. I hear the Countess is very beautiful. I worship all things beautiful—ergo, I shall worship her Ladyship, though not as I worship the Unknown."

Now this letter had annoyed the Earl; not simply on account of its allusion to Miss Seymour, but he could not show it to Helena, because he did not care for her to know that Mr. Ross had her likeness, and she had such a way of asking questions, she would be sure to want to know all about this "beautiful Unknown." But still more did the remarks about Margaret excessively annoy him, and

what was worse, made him uneasy. As by a gleam of light, the sudden opening of a shutter, he saw things very differently from what they had seemed before. Could it be possible that his high regard for her had led him astray, and caused him to become a source of misery to her? What if Glen were right?

And then the white face of the noble Earl, the true-hearted gentleman, was dyed crimson at the thought of his own "audacity," as he termed it; and he drew himself up in his saddle, and raised his hat to let the cool wind fan his hot forehead, as again and again he said, "It could not be;" yet doubts fluttered like black bats among his thoughts, bewildering him, until he heaved a long deep breath which might be called a sigh; but there are so many sorrowful words in this history. Would that there *could* be more sunshine in it!

"Do let it be a happy book," kind, merrie, gentle ones have pleaded, "life is so full of real sorrow—that we do want sunshine in our stories."

Even so—life is so full of sorrow that if the faithful truth be penned, there must be pain. It might be written that Margaret was one of those often-to-be-met-with girls, who would not let "concealment like a worm i' th' bud feed on her damask cheek"—that she had called pride to her aid, and to show Edward how vain his suspicions were, had fluttered away on bridal gauze, some fair morning—the envied of her maidens. It might be so written, but it would be belying Margaret's noble nature. The sadness of the General's history might be covered by exciting the indignation of the reader against him as a scoundrel—but he was not that, he was simply a melancholy man, once destined to be something better—who had missed his way. Little Mary's pain, it may be, was the penalty of some forefather's sin, and the widowhood of the Countess was a trial that has ennobled many a gentle woman. If life be

painted as it is, the shadows must be deep. Recollection was a faithful historian to the Earl now as he rode through the lane with his beautiful wife by his side, it gave back to him many an incident of his friendship with Margaret, that made him truly wretched.

"Helena," he startled her by saying suddenly, not looking at her, but switching his horse's mane, "what sort of a——I mean, what kind of a girl, or rather character, was Miss Seymour at school?"

The Countess was just trying to fasten up a braid of hair that had fallen, and her bridle was not even on her arm. She looked at him with such astonished eyes, yet without speaking, that he too looked at her, and burst into a laugh, which was as suddenly checked by a hasty,—

"Naughty child! look there," taking up her bridle.

"Why, Cranford, what in the world has made you ask that?"

He colored. "I don't know. A mere passing thought."

"Your passing thoughts have been long in going, Cranford; do you know you haven't spoken a single word since we left St. Hilda's; and we are at Briar Farm?"

"So we are. Well, darling?"

"Well!"

They joined in a hearty laugh at their almost absurd position; it was the comic aspect of things, certainly.

"Let me see, what sort of a something was it? a girl, lady, or character, you called Margaret Seymour? Well, as a girl, in appearance she bade fair to be as handsome as she is. As a lady, I never knew one like her; delicacy of thought and feeling pervaded every action; the whole school paid her instinctively far more respect than they paid that cross old thing, Mrs. Elmore."

Had Helena been now at school, and in disgrace, she could not have expressed more vexation.

"Well, little one, you are not going to be punished to-day, so never mind her." The Earl's expressive eyes gave her a fond look.

"Cranford, I must canter her out of my head. You should have seen her in her velvet and turban!"

The remainder of the sentence was lost in the sound of clattering hoofs, until they came to a hill.

"Then as to character," said Helena, looking meditatively at the landscape, "she was so good, Cranford, so pure, that I don't think Margaret could do wrong. I used to kneel at prayers where I could look at her, her face was such a picture of holy thought. Her brow was so calm, her lips so still, and her eyes so dark. And then if any of us were ill, or in trouble, she had such a tender way with us, such a comforting way; all the little girls adored her And I don't believe she ever got into trouble with Madame. I did so often!"

"I am sure you did," said her husband, laughing—"my wilful sprite; bless you! But was she a dreamy girl?"

"Dreamy! Oh, Longleat! Margaret dreamy! she is the most earnest character I ever knew. We used to say that she would have made a heroine. I think the reason was that she was so true, and she always gave her love with such intensity. Now, for instance in my case, several circumstances caused us to become friends. I know I often disappointed and grieved her; but when I used to kiss her, and ask her to forgive me, she would make me feel that I had the power to wound her heart, not her self-love (and that is so rare in friendship). Once she said, 'Helena, you know, having once loved you, I can never cease to do so; and you make me so anxious for you. I
so struck, it made me good—it did indeed," she said

in a lively tone; "but I didn't live happy ever after for all that."

Some recollection brought the color and the pretty pout again, which at another time would have amused the quiet Earl, who was thoroughly fascinated by Helena's elfish ways; she was so different from himself; but he could not even smile now, for "Ariadne" was in his mind, confused with Helena's words.

"And so it always would be with Margaret: she would be true through life, faithful to death. Dear Margaret!"

They turned in at the Longleat gates as she said this.

"There is papa!" she exclaimed, dashing after him. The General was quietly walking his horse, followed by his steady old groom, who touched his hat in delight as his young lady (for she was still that to him) cantered past him with a kind word and smile.

"Papa, this *is* a pleasure. We have so often been to Calton, and found you were still away."

Here the Earl rode up and greeted the General with warm cordiality.

"I came to see you on a little business, my Lord."

"Which I will not attend to unless you will dine with us, sir."

The General agreed to do so, and in a while Helena was flying up the staircase to the rooms of the Dowager.

"My love, have you not been over-exerting yourself?" she said. "Are you not wearied? Longleat must take more care of you."

"Dear mamma," she pronounced the words slowly, always with a shy hesitance, that Lady Cranford told the Earl, gave her a most affecting insight into the child's past.

"I am not the least tired. We have been to St. Hilda's, and have had a talk."

"Do you usually ride in silence, my dear?" asked the lady, stroking the head that nestled against her.

"No, but our conversation turned upon ruins and death, and I don't think I have enjoyed my morning overmuch. Lady Cranford, papa is here."

It was just Helena's way to jump from grave to gay, and back again, if impulse led.

"I am very glad, dear. It is the first time, is it not, that he has dined at your table?"

"Yes, he has been away. Poor papa!"

There was no reason for Helena saying this; but just a passing one of tenderness. Lady Cranford sighed.

"My love," she said, "if you have a good hope, death will not make you sad. And I should like my daughter, whom I love so well, to remember that now is the seed-time with her. Later sowings will never bring such golden harvests. A well-spent morning brings peace at sunset. The same staff which helped me up life's hill, now supports me in going down the other side—the staff of God's love—it will make the solemn halls of death the porch of heaven to me." She rose, drew Helena to her breast, and kissed her tenderly.

How difficult the remembrance of that one hour made the resolve of another!

Any stranger seated at that dinner-table would have considered the Earl to be a perfectly happy man, free from all care; his Countess a gay, beautiful creature, whom sorrow could not scathe; the Dowager, a dignified woman—gravely dignified—with a vein of quiet humour in her nature. He would have been a little puzzled by the General. He was not ungenial, but the habits of a life are not abandoned in an hour; and he was so serious [illegible] lena's merry laugh, heard now and then, seemed [illegible] him. It was a sound that had never broken [illegible] dness of the Calton dinner-hour; but Helena's

naturally joyful nature was blooming luxuriantly. It had readily taken root in this new soil, fostered, too, by warm sunshine, sheltered from all winds, but that of the soft south. More than once her father looked at her in surprise, and he paused in his conversation with the Dowager, to listen to a playful skirmish between the Earl and herself, in which her light weapon of wit served her well.

Her father watched her, as he sipped his wine, and could scarcely help smiling at the manner in which she met her husband's arguments. Her shield was always ready, so that his arrows glanced back, often striking her adversary. The conversation had somehow turned upon the "thoughtless time of youth"—that was Cranford's term, and she defended it.

"It is the thoughtful time," the Dowager and her father heard her say; "it shows its wisdom by taking life as it comes; enjoying its sunshine; not dreading ills which may never be; and if they do come, by riding lightly over them. Old age wastes its remaining sands by allowing them to pass unenjoyed."

"Helena," said her father, "only those who have passed the brow can tell how short the span is between sunrise and its set. Only such can look back and see what different paths they might have chosen. It makes them grave. They have learned that no joy abides, and that sorrow sows its seeds in every path. You call it wasting the sands not to enjoy them with the glee of youth; I call it making the best use of them to throw the light of reflection, which is the lamp of old age, upon each one as it falls. The last steps of life are the most difficult, and therefore need more watchful care. The nearer we approach the shores of immortality, the more solemnly do we sound the depths of time. Pleasure ought not to be captain when the storm-beaten

ship is nearing the haven. The firm hand, the watchful eye are needed then at the helm; so few enter safely—so few!"

He looked and spoke with his habitual grave quietude, though his smile at Helena was beautiful.

No one spoke for a little while. The Dowager was gazing thoughtfully at the flowers before her; and the Countess carelessly, unconscious of what she was doing, was wreathing a cypress spray among the green and purple grapes upon her plate; and the Earl was in such a reverie that the General twice asked if he could grant half an hour now, before he heard him. Then Helena noticed that that care-worn look of trouble came to her husband's face which she had seen there before, when that "clergyman" had called.

An hour or two later, the General rose from his seat in the library, saying—

"And you still adhere to your resolution, my Lord?"

"General Davenant, at all costs, at all risks, my mother must not know it. I believe it would kill her. The secret, I am quite convinced, may be kept; in fact, that it is safe."

They went to the music-hall, where Lady Cranford sat beside the fire. Helena, at the organ, was singing, "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

It so brought back to Cranford's remembrance that night at Bronwylfa, when Margaret sang it for him, that he could have almost believed he heard that same voice now.

He shook off the recollection, which was unwelcome, and asked for his favourite solo anthem, "He bendeth down to aid thee."

Her rich voice rang through the hall, floated away in the dome, and came down in soft, sweetly modulated, almost whispered tones, as she gave the last line, "Depart

in peace." Her singing had an almost "uncanny" influence on the three. It seemed to come from the spirit-land, where no discord mars the harmony of song.

Her father bent down to kiss her forehead, without a word. He heard that anthem again and again, as he wended his way to his solitary home.

CHAPTER XI.

DEATH IN A PRISON.

. . . . Who could bear to lose the balmy air
Of summer's breath, from all things fresh and fair,
With all that man admires or loves below;
All earth and water, wood and vale bestow,
Where rosy pleasures smile, whence real blessings flow;
With sight and sound of every kind that lives,
And crowning all with joy that freedom gives?

CRABBE.

THE afternoon of a bleak November day was fast merging into night. The bitter, icy wind, that came sweeping from the moorlands of Northern England, entered the wretched city-homes, where poverty-stricken inmates were ill prepared to meet its keen blasts.

Manchester seemed deserted. Shop-doors were closed (though the gas shone within), as if the owners despaired of custom on such a night. The street lamp-lights flickered as the gusts swept by, and only a few shivering pedestrians were to be seen. One mill in Oxford Road alone looked inviting, with its rows of starry lights; and a few homeless ones—outcasts in God's lower world—lingered near it to catch a breath of heated air, as the doors swung to and fro.

Edward was in his library. The curtains were closed; the cannel fire blazed in defiance of frost and snow, and made that room a very hotbed of bright color and of summer warmth.

"What a bitter night it is, Edward!" said his sister

entering with a shiver. She was dressed for dinner, and looked very comfortable in her dark poplin dress trimmed with swans'-down.

"Come here, Maggie!" he said. "I want your opinion of this scheme."

She came to the back of the chair, took his hand in one of her cold ones; with the other she smoothed the hair from his forehead, and kissed it.

"What scheme, your Reverence?"

"Don't you think that, this winter, it would be an excellent plan to open the church for the purpose of giving some kind of entertainment to the people?"

She looked at him incredulously.

"An entertainment, Edward?"

"I use that word for want of a better, a more expressive one. I don't mean a service, but a something which will attract them, and give them a pleasant, instructive evening. See here. I have a list of subjects jotted down which I think might be discussed without desecrating the church; and why that should be left in darkness through the week, when an inviting gin-shop stands open next to it, I cannot imagine. It strikes me that the Devil and the orthodox are brought into collision, and that the former has the better of it."

She read over his shoulder—

"Good music essential to Divine worship."

"Very good," she said, laughing. "I hope John Croft will profit by it, and learn that there are other tunes beside the Old Hundred. He always will bring it in somehow, until his next neighbour has to nudge him. When I spoke to him, he scratched his head, and said, 'He ne'er had a ear for tunes, but he thowt it wur o' reet.'"

"He has more than once tested my gravity," Edward said, laughing heartily.

"Town and Country—Man's Work and God's."

She shook her head.

"You will bring more discontent into Angel Meadow, Edward. I laughed, the first night I came, at your delight on seeing the flowers I brought. Now, the sight of a bouquet inclines me to cry."

He threw back his head, and said, anxiously,

"Are you quite happy here, Maggie?"

She raised herself on tip-toes, and, stooping over the chair, closed his lips with a kiss.

"It is the contrast, Edward, between God's work and man's. Go on."

"Toil a curse: Work a blessing."

"Ah, I see. You mean that toil is *over*-work—a strain imposed by tyranny or by necessity; but work is a healthful blessing, stimulating heart and brain."

"Just so, my darling. My exact meaning, only expressed better than I could have done. Stay."

He took a bit of paper, and noted her words exactly; at which she smiled and blushed.

"Too fine a distinction for Angel Meadow, my reverend brother. The next."

Instead of giving the next, he kissed the white hand that held his own.

"My precious sister! you are a help and comfort to me," he said.

"Don't be sweethearting your own Sis," she said, lightly. "What a devoted husband you will make—but too demonstrative for fashionable society. A worthy son of papa, who likes to show his love for his wife, as he did when their marriage-bells rang."

"Speaking of marriage-bells; I wonder," said Edward, "how the Earl and his bride are? I suppose she has grown quite wifely, though, now."

The old Bronwylfa title, "Our Earl," was never used

in Edgware Street now. Margaret rarely named Lord Cranford; and Edward had now and then had a fleeting suspicion, which he could not have defined, but which had left an impression upon his mind that prevented him from talking much of the Earl.

"Go on," said Margaret, not replying to his "wonder."

"Home."

"Good. I will tell the wives it is for them; but they must invite their husbands."

"Saturday Night: An Especial Address to the Working Men."

She nodded. "They need it, some of them. I have a lecture in store for John Croft and Edward Wardle. The bairns did not get their promised new shoes last week. I am afraid the 'Three Bells' got the wages instead. Well!"

"Little Children."

"I like that. What a congregation of mothers you will have! But, Eddy, dear, isn't it a funny subject for a bachelor?"

"No," he said. "The swarming, neglected little ones in Angel Meadow have made me a sadder, and, I hope, a more thoughtful man. Their future is the future of England. Manchester is only a type of other towns and cities. It does not require that a man should be married to make him feel the responsibility of bringing up the little ones."

"Now we go from home."

"Something about the Pilgrim Fathers, and the land they went to."

"They will listen as to a fairy tale. One-half the youngsters will be for emigrating; and all will think more of their religious freedom. Any more?"

"No more jotted down. But what do you think of the idea? Will the people appreciate the effort?"

"We must not wait to be satisfied of that before we try it, Edward. 'Dare, and Do.' We must have an inauguration tea in the factory-room. (This was a room rented by Edward for his few scholars.) That part of your scheme must be my care, and that will be my opportunity for giving the wee ones their frocks, and the elders their blankets. I am so glad papa sent me such a handsome present."

Her brother turned aside, and stirred the already blazing fire; his voice trembled a little as he said,

"Maggie, I am so thankful you are my sister."

"I should think so, Mr. Edward Seymour! and why?"

She leaned over him laughing.

"Because, dear, if you had not been, I should have missed my life's blessing. Had I known you, I could not have presumed to have asked you to be my wife?"

"Why not?" there was anxiety in her tone.

"Because you seem too good to marry."

"Nonsense, Edward. Never was a woman yet too good to love, too strong to be taken care of, if her heart could be read."

She spoke in a tone that was almost sharp, and her manner was a little excited, which surprised him.

The door opened. Manvers announced dinner.

"What a cosy evening we shall have, Edward," she said as they re-entered the library, where a dessert of fine forced fruit from home was placed temptingly on a little table near the fire. As she uttered the words the hall bell rang, and then a note was brought to Edward from the chaplain of the Bailey Street Prison, to ask if he would visit a dying prisoner for him, as he himself was confined to bed with illness.

It was a disappointment to both, and the night was very dreary, but Edward never hesitated when duty called, and Margaret sent him off with a cheerful smile.

As soon as he had gone she returned to the library, and

had just seated herself before the fire, when the hall bell rang again. She glanced at the time-piece—"the post," she thought; but she heard footsteps, and in a moment the servant announced Mr. Glen Ross.

She was so surprised that for a moment she sat still, looking at him; then recollecting herself, she rose and gave her hand most cordially.

"I know you will be surprised to see me again," he said in the rich sonorous voice which brought back to her so vividly that happy day in the Exchange Rooms, when she first heard it. "My train was late, and I cannot go on to-night, so I was bold enough, Miss Seymour, to think that you would let me sit by your fire-side for an hour or two. I do so abhor lonely hotel rooms."

"You are very welcome, Mr. Ross."

Margaret was a little embarrassed by her surprise. She did not expect Edward to return for some hours, and her guest so impressed her (as he impressed every one) as being a man of great power and intellect, that the thought of having to entertain him made her nervous. She need not have been anxious. Like all clever men, with hearts to match their brains, he found great pleasure and repose in the society of a well-educated, truly feminine woman.

So she availed herself of an English woman's privilege in confusing circumstances, by taking up the "deputy," (the use of which her Celtic guest always laughed at), and did what she could to spoil a good fire.

In the meantime Mr. Ross was "scanning" his hostess (Yorkshire readers will understand that phrase).

She was so pale, so slight, that it was on his lips to ask if she had been an invalid; but there was such quiet dignity in her manner, such a sweetly pensive expression in her eyes, which seemed to tell him there was sorrow underneath, that the question was not put.

"Have you dined, Mr. Ross?"

"I have had such a dinner, Miss Seymour, as must plead my apology for the tea I will take, if you will ask me. I left London before noon. At least I suppose it was London; the city was submerged in pease-soup, which *they* call fog."

She laughed, and rang the bell. "I am sorry that Edward is absent. He has just been called to the prison."

"A most lively place to visit on a dreary night, Miss Seymour! What has he gone to see, the 'Comedy of Errors?'"

"No, a dying prisoner."

Her gravity checked his smile.

When Mr. Ross came downstairs from his refreshing toilette, he found his hostess before the tea-urn; the fire-flame and the lights were reflected in its polished silver; he was so struck by the air of comfort and brightness which pervaded the room, that as he seated himself by her side, he said, half playfully, half sadly,

"Miss Seymour, I shall feel the loneliness of other evenings after this glimpse of home life."

"Have you no mother, no sister, Mr. Ross?"

"Neither, nor a single living relative. I am the 'one solitaire,' the last of my race now, for my only family connection was buried yesterday."

Margaret looked her sympathy.

"It is well that I am the last of the line," he said, lightly, "or the old name might have been lost in some Saxon alliance. It may be lost after all, for I have not yet found my ideal; you remember her portrait."

She was just going to say, "Have you not seen the Countess?" but she recollected Lord Cranford's prohibition, and answered nothing. Even yet it was a luxury to respect his slightest wish. So the words were not said.

Had they been spoken, would the current of events have been changed? Who can tell, save the Searcher of all

hearts? No human judgment could divine: a destiny has often hung upon a thread. A look, a word, a tone has power to sway our deepest passions, to lead our groping wills to life—happiness, or woe.

"By the way, have you seen my friend Longleat lately?" he asked.

She was thinking of him at the moment, and the blood rushed to her face.

"Not since his marriage," she replied; and then there was silence. Mr. Ross noticed her confusion, by reason of which he became very intent on satisfying his appetite, and then in a brisk manner, he adroitly turned the conversation to general topics. He was a brilliant musician, so that naturally their talk led up to song. At her request he presently went to the piano. He was beginning the fourth verse of Moore's exquisite melody,

She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps,

when Edward entered.

Margaret saw her guest's gratification at the welcome he received.

"I come as a passenger-bird," he said, "and the warmth of your welcome, Mr. Edward, is like summer's to the swallow."

Margaret had been resting upon the couch, the music had strangely affected her, every heart-string was vibrating. A glance at her brother's face told her that something had disturbed him; for after this courteous salutation, it was so deeply grave.

"Did you find the man very ill, Edward?"

"He is dead," he replied.

"Dead!" She was shocked; for even when that last change comes after lingering illness, it is so solemn, because life is over, that we are awed, and unable to realize the truth; but in this case the chaplain had said that the

prisoner had been suddenly seized—only yesterday—and now he was dead.

"Yes, he died when I was there. We parsons see strange sights, Mr. Ross. I have in Manchester; but none so strange as this night's. There was something in the place, too, that added to its horror. The gloom of the passages; the single gas-jets flaring here and there; the sound of keys turning as we passed through each door; the garb of the officials — all struck me very painfully after the brightness of home. I thought hell itself could not be more hopelessly dismal than that abode of sadness and sin. When I entered the sick ward, I found three beds occupied; by the side of one sat a priest, holding a crucifix. I think I shall never forget the look of despairing agony which the man fixed on that cross. By the side of him whom I went to see, Margaret, old Mr. Allen sat. It appears he knew this Holden once, who had sent for him. I contrasted the difference in the positions of those two men. There was the sad but beautiful distinction between the sinner and the saint. I spoke to the man, asked what I could do for him, and told him that I was there in the chaplain's place.

"'Sir,' he said, in such a sad, heart-broken voice, that I cannot forget it, 'you can do nothing for me; but I thought I should die easier, maybe, if I saw a parson, and told him something that lies heavy on my mind.'

"I told him that his end was very near, and that unless he felt obliged to make his statement to me, that I would rather carry all his sins to the Saviour whilst there was a chance of his obtaining forgiveness, every moment was so precious. His illness was acute inflammation, and mortification had already set in, the doctor told me. But he said he could not die easy without telling me; so that if ever I could do anything which might undo his work, he made me promise I would. In the first place, he said that

his position had been better once; but that was long, very long ago; for when he was twenty-eight years of age he was transported to Hobart Town, for sheep-stealing, when coming from a fair. He was drunk, and might be guilty; but he knew nothing of it. And so his ruin began. But this was the story he told me.

"When he was a youth he was gardener in the grounds of a lunatic asylum. In those days asylums were generally dens of cruelty; but from his statement I should say this one was better than the average. However, one of the inmates was a foreign lady, who had been placed there by a gentleman. She was taken into the garden for exercise very frequently, and from the great consideration shown to her, this man judged that she was in a superior position. Holden often gave flowers to her, as she showed great fondness for them; and one day she talked to him about gardening so sensibly, that he was not astonished to hear soon afterwards that she was leaving, being cured. He could tell nothing of the circumstances attending her discharge. He saw her drive away quite alone. That same night she frightened him by waylaying him on his way home, and asking if he knew of any quiet lodging in the neighbourhood. He told her that his mother had two rooms, which she let; but he said, 'I thought of two things, sir; one was that she had been in the madhouse, and the other was that she was such a lady our rooms wouldn't be good enough for her.'

"She said (Holden continued), 'You need not fear me.' And she made me show her the way to our house. When we got there, she looked round, and it was just what she wanted.

"Many days passed, and his mother liked her very much, Holden said; he had been afraid she would not, for as soon as the lady first went in, his mother had looked at her, and given, as he expressed it, 'a queer kind

o' skreigh.' But she wouldn't say nothing when I asked her (he said) what she'd done that for; so I thought it was on account of the lady's eyes, for everybody in the asylum, and out of it, working men in the grounds even, had talked of them. But mother only said,

"'Ay, lad, I once saw a pair to match 'em, an' ne'er since,' but she would not tell when.

"Then (he said) one night 'the lady,' as we called her, came into th' house-place and talked to us, mother an' me. I put her a chair by the fire-side, and she asked me what book I was reading. It was 'Robinson Crusoe.' She said if I liked she would read a bit for us; and then she talked about Spain, where she come from, an' telled us things as wonderful as you ever heard, sir. We got to like her very much. A few days after she said, after thinkin' a deal, and sitting quiet,

"'Mrs. Holden, would you and Philip help me if you could?'

"'Ay,' my mother said, 'we would.'

"Then she got up, and barred the cottage door, and began telling us her story, which was this:—She had been married to a gentleman as proved a very unkind husband; he took her abroad, and then got tired of her, and she hadn't a relation nor a friend in all the world besides him. His cruelty made her very ill betimes, near mad; but not mad: she stuck to that. He got the doctors to say that she wur mad though (and both mother and me thought she had been, poor lady!); and he brought her to England, and placed her in that asylum. She said he had done it to turn her brain, and that if he could lay hold of her he'd do it again, for all the physicians had told the Commissioners that she was quite right now. And then she said, 'I was questioned who it was that had brought me there. Mad I might be; but I knew, and I also knew where to get money, for I had had it lying for years. I

got it through the Doctor, and told them the gentleman had cast me off, so they didn't know he was my husband; and when they found my bankers sent me money, they let me go.' Now she wanted a note written, as if by the matron, to say that she was dead and buried. Then she said, 'If my husband comes to see my grave, or makes any inquiries, though I shall hide from him, I'll forgive him, because I shall think he was sorry.'

"Well, sir (he continued), we didn't consent all at once. Mother feared the law might be agen us; but the lady said it was only an experiment, but it would help her to be more happy, and she offered a very handsome bribe too. So we took it, for we wur very poor; an' we promised to keep her secret; and the letter were wrote and sent, and then the lady went a bit further off, for fear her husband should come; but days and weeks went on, and so I asked the matron at last if she had heered anythin' of the lady?

"'Oh, no, poor thing,' she said. 'I wonder wheer she is. Nobody's never come to see after her. Maybe she's got all right to her friends.'

"'Hasn't the gentleman been as brought her?' I asked.

"'Not him,' she said. 'He's none good. She's better 'bout him.'

"So I went to see the lady, an' told her, an' then she came to our house for her things, an' we never saw her again, though she wrote sometimes. An' just before I wur caught, a letter came sayin' she wur goin into a convent, for she was miserable about what she had done, and wanted to get out of the way; so mother an' me wur 'feared of talkin' about it to oursels even then."

"This is the most singular fraud I ever heard of," said Mr. Ross.

"Yes; but the strangest part of the story is this:—When that first letter was written, the lady kept the name of the gentleman secret; but when the lady's letter came

to them, the mother told her son that she knew it, for she had witnessed the marriage. It had been a private one, in the house of the lady's guardian, where she was cook in the place; and that, having her curiosity excited, she had peeped through the keyhole, and had seen the marriage, and heard all that went on. She told this to the lady before she went away, and told her, too, her husband's name; but promised to keep it from her son, and had always done so. She told him that, as soon as she saw the lady, she knew she had seen her somewhere, for she was remarkable-looking; but it was some little time before she remembered when and where."

"Sir (Holden said, anxiously and piteously), I must have broken my mother's heart, for she never thought to see her Philip a convict. It was a shame an' a sin (he said, vehemently), to send a lad that had never done worse than get drunk to that hell upon earth—Hobart Town. I got hardened there, sir; I served apprentice to the Devil, an' no mistake. But oh, sir! the sin as my mother an' me helped on has been the heaviest weight at the top of all. Can nothing be done, sir? It haunts me that evil will come of it.

"The death-damp was on his face. He was free from pain, but quite powerless. We gave him some brandy to revive him, and then I said, 'Holden, try to make peace with your God, for I can offer no comfort. If this strange story were told, it could do no good now; it might bring unhappiness upon an innocent family. Your sin was very awful; your fraud very terrible. Of the lady I scarcely dare say what I think; but on the husband rests the curse.'"

"He was a scoundrel!" exclaimed Mr. Ross, pacing the room indignantly. "Well, Mr. Edward, and what more passed?"

"I asked if he had more to tell? 'No, nothing. She

haunts me with her great eyes!' he called. His cry was frightful. The priest, who had, of course, heard all, got up and came to Holden. He put his hand upon his head, and said, 'Is your mother yet living? Can she prove this?' 'My mother!' he sighed rather than said, gave one convulsive movement, and was gone! I felt utterly powerless. The turnkey, who had not left the room, came forward and closed the staring eyes of the dead man. His great bunch of jail-keys jingled as he did so—a strange knell for a departed soul!"

Margaret, who had sat up listening to this strange story, whispered,

"Edward, what will you do?"

"I can do nothing, dear. I tremble to think what misery I might carry into some family. I forgot to say that Holden told me the lady wrote, not long ago, that her husband had married again, and that a daughter was born; so you see she must have kept a close watch upon him. Think what a fearful effect this tale would have upon a happy family."

"Happy!" said Mr. Ross. "Is there a God, that such a man should have a happy home? It amounted to intentional murder on his part when he placed his wife in that asylum!"

"Perhaps not," said Edward, in his gentle way, as he pressed his hand to his aching head. "Perhaps she was mad. Holden said she was."

"It looks preciously like murder, Mr. Edward, when he could not even ask some particulars of her death, and did not place her there in her own name. What a life she must have had, to have afterwards cast from herself her name, position, and perhaps every comfort. Heaven help her if she still lives, and Heaven help the child!"

Mr. Ross paced the room restlessly. Margaret sat pale and cold. Her tears were falling. Edward leaned

his head back against the chair, and closed his eyes. Margaret could not tell why, but she thought of General Davenant and Helena so much that her thought made her uncomfortable.

But she did not name this—not, indeed, until years had passed.

Edward persuaded his guest to remain over the night. Mr. Ross was too happy in this home to care to return to his hotel. He and Edward sat up late. Mr. Ross referred to Margaret's apparent delicacy. The allusion seemed to distress her brother. Then the Earl's name rose on the surface of their conversation, and was mentioned coldly by Edward. This deepened Mr. Ross's former suspicions. But he was mistaken in his conjecture about Edward's thoughts—they were all engrossed by recollections of the prison-scene.

The next morning, he and Margaret drove their guest to the station; and Mr. Ross went whirling through the day and night to his lonely "Tower" on the bleak moors of Scotland.

CHAPTER XII.

LONDON.

Alas!—how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love!
Hearts that the world in vain had tried,
And sorrow but more closely tied;
That stood the storm when waves were rough,
Yet in a sunny hour fall off,
Like ships, that have gone down at sea,
When heav'n was all tranquillity!
A something light as air—a look,
A word unkind, or wrongly taken—
Oh! love, that tempests never shook,
A breath, a touch like this hath shaken.

LALLA ROOKH.

THE Season had commenced, and promised to be an unusually brilliant one. The arrival in town of the Earl and Countess of Longleat had been duly announced. Helena's beauty had been much spoken of, and curiosity to see her was great. She had not been well since the day at St. Hilda's, and the physicians still prescribed "early hours." She spent much of her time in looking through the windows on the park. The Dowager was amused by her child-like interest in the scene there. Helena's life had been so secluded, that her pleasure was natural.

"Her freshness will create a sensation, Longleat," his mother said one evening, about a week after their arrival.

The Earl smiled, and went to his wife's boudoir.

"What, Helena!" Lord Cranford started. "Expelled, Helena!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she answered, spiritedly. "Well, what of that? It was for a mere freak; and it never would have occurred but for Margaret's exclamation."

"Which? the expulsion, or the freak?"

"I shall not answer you, Longleat, if you speak to me so. It occurred before I knew you, and you have no right to bring up against me now a mere act of girlish folly."

"Helena," he said, commanding his voice, and speaking gently, "if such a disgrace falls upon a boy it clings to him in manhood—an indelible stain which he can rarely wipe away. No one forgets it. I thought that women felt these things more keenly; but it seems I was mistaken. You are quite right. I ought not to charge you with the past; but I would suffer much for you if I might wipe out the stain."

This gentleness touched her. "Listen, Longleat," she said, "it was nothing more than this." She told her story.

"Do you mean that you rode at midnight, Helena?"

She nodded. "And I assure you that Jupiter looked quite as much surprised as the god would have done had Juno told him he could not have his four white horses out. It will always be a source of satisfaction to me that I checkmated that turbaned tyrant, Mrs. Elmore. I hate tyrants." She spoke with provoking nonchalance.

The Earl knew that though she referred to Mrs. Elmore, she was still more thinking of himself.

"Of course you replied, Helena, when Mrs. Elmore questioned you?"

She twisted her girdle nervously, and did not answer.

"You don't mean that you denied it?"

She flushed scarlet. He would not look at her; but paced the room in silence.

"I can well imagine," he said at last, "why so noble a nature as Miss Seymour's should have awed you. Truth has mighty power, Helena."

Perhaps he regretted the words as soon as spoken, for he turned towards her; but she, with flashing eyes, said, "You once told me you would rather take me with a weight of sin than you would a saint. I was true enough then to tell you I was not good. I think it very well for Margaret that you did not love her—her devotion and your fickleness would not have amalgamated, my Lord."

The Earl had had no conception that his dove-like Helena could be so sarcastic. Before he could answer her she had left the room. He was very wretched. What a change a few words may cause. Ah, we should deal gently with one another. The human heart is too easily wounded to bear rough handling, and every bruise from the hand of one it loves leaves a scar.

It was true that he had deceived her; that he had stained his hitherto unsullied integrity; though he had done so in the mistaken idea of sparing her whom he so much loved; but also, it must be confessed, because he had shrunk from the possibility of losing her.

It was so different in her case. They had not been idle words that he had once spoken at St. Hilda's, perhaps he was over-sensitive; but the lustre of the truth and purity in which he had believed was dimmed by Helena's defence of her fault. Then he recalled his mother's words about her life and training—his heart reproached him. He went to seek her, and overtook her in the picture-gallery. She did not hear her husband's step. He had his arm round her before she saw him.

"Forgive me, dear, I was harsh."

She submitted passively to his caress.

"I was very cruel, little one."

Then she burst into passionate tears but turned aside to hide them. They had been shed upon his breast before. Not so now. She had learned to fear him in this one hour, and Helena was such a strange combination of timidity and daring, that the slightest harshness roused her ire or chilled her love. They were never quite the same afterwards.

When he entered the drawing-room he found her laughing merrily at Fidèle's tricks; she relapsed into gravity when she saw him, however. Bending his head, he whispered, "Anima, mia! tell me I am forgiven."

The kiss he left upon her pale forehead was light as a snow flake.

Her lips quivered, as she said, "You will love me, Longleat, though——" her words were parted by a sobbing breath—"though I am so stained."

"I was so cruel, my own,"

"And I do bear such a stain."

"Hush! hush!" he said, soothingly, pushing back the hair from her brow. "Who shall dare to say you are stained, my beautiful, my peerless one!"

"You said so, my husband."

It was the first time that Helena had called him by that sacred name, and it was in the tone of a plaint, not the proud expression of a fond wife's love.

Her husband remembered it after many days.

The next day Helena had her first ride in Rotten Row. There was no sign of last evening's trouble upon her face as she passed through the gates of Eglinton House.

Helena was happily unconscious of the sensation she created in the "Row." There was not a particle of vanity in her nature.

When they returned home, she left the Earl and ran along a terrace to gather some scarlet flowers. He followed her.

"I do delight in these rich colors," she said. "How beautifully these white ones contrast with the red."

"Do you remember the night we first met, Helena?"

"Of course I do."

"Do you know I thought once that night that you had little heart? I was bold enough to blame your lavish waste of flower life, and you answered rather scornfully, 'They only bloomed to be gathered.'"

"And that made you think I had no heart!" Her lip curled. "You understood me as little then as you do now. I might have seemed cold; but who had ever cared to know what my nature was? I had never known any love but Elspie's. I never had one tender caress from papa; often days passed without my seeing him. I have walked, when a child, past his doors quietly, lest I should remind him of my existence. Yet, as I grew older there was nothing I dreaded so much as a dead heart. I think some hearts would have died in such a lonely life as mine. Are you going to bring all my past sins against me, Longleat?"

There was great pathos in the child's tone as she looked into his face, with the blood-red clusters drooping from her folded hands, and the unshed tears dimming the violet of her eyes. With justice she might have reproached him for unnecessary harshness, but no such thought had nest in her heart. She only felt like a wee bairn that had sinned unwittingly, and had been reproved sternly.

"Nay," he said, "I have no charge to bring. Pardon me, I was only too anxious to find a flaw in one so perfect, if by my finding I might dare to hope to win her. You remember the old silly song, Helena—

> 'I think, tho' you're almost an angel,
> I am but a mortal man?'"

Then they returned to the house. As he walked an uneasy conviction entered his mind, that he had too readily

taken it for granted his love would be sufficient for her happiness. He began to doubt it now, to see more clearly into their true position. And why? because he was also beginning to understand her nature better. He saw depths in it he had not fathomed. He went to his library where he was pacing to and fro, thinking these thoughts, when Helena came in rather quickly.

"Cranford," she said, "I have brought you a note. I have been a little startled."

"Startled, my dear! by whom?"

"After I left you, I went back to the terrace to see if that fern I brought from Longleat was flourishing, when someone—a gentleman, and from his appearance I should say a clergyman—came from behind the clump of bushes, where the little walk is, and he asked if I were the Countess of Longleat? On my replying, he inquired if I would kindly deliver this note to the Earl himself, as it was private and important. Of course I said I would, and then he went. Here it is. See what it says."

She spoke in an excited tone. Lord Cranford was alarmed instantly, for he guessed from whom the letter came.

"Read it," she said, after he had almost snatched it from her hand.

"It will be only a begging affair, no doubt, Helena. Should you not rest a little before dressing? You must look your fairest, pretty one, for the Duchess, she is my mother's oldest friend." He rose as he spoke, and went to the table—where he adroitly substituted the letter she had just given to him for one lying there.

"As I thought," he said, carelessly throwing it down.

"How provoking! to be startled for nothing too. It was a piece of impertinence, Cranford, his coming there."

She gathered up her riding-whip and gloves, and went ray singing gaily. He opened the letter and read.

"My Lord,—As an honorable man I wish to keep faith with you to the very letter; but there are higher claims than my honor or your pride. It does not seem right that Mrs. Davenant's interests should be set aside, nor will she, I think, consent to take the veil. Her marriage is not a secret; it is known to those who have the right to command my obedience, and any day I may be called upon to act for Mrs. Davenant against the General.

"Felix Domingo."

This was worse than anything the Earl had feared. Stephanie he felt he could trust, the priest he could not, still less those in higher authority. He shivered as he thought of all the misery that might be impending. A fire was laid, he put a light to it, and sat down with his face hidden in his hands. There is no attitude which so expresses a man's misery. He sat so long that the sun had gone down, the immense room was all in shadow; the fire had burned to dull red embers, every chime of the time-piece sounded with startling loudness, jarring his nerves. The door opened, closed, then opened again quickly.

"Are you there, Longleat?"

"Yes, darling," he said, huskily.

She came gliding across the room—it seemed to him like a vision of light.

"Why, you are not dressed!"

"Dressed!" he repeated, absently.

She laughed merrily.

"Cranford, confess you have been sleeping," as she stirred the fire and raised his face to look at the clock; then she knelt on the tiger-skin before him, with her delicate lace flowing round her like clouds of spray, and the diamonds on her brow and neck and arms flashing back the brilliance of the flames. How beautiful she was!

He laid his hand upon her head.

"Take care, Longleat, there are thorns in my crown."

The tiara had been one of the Earl's bridal gifts, designed especially by him. Sprays of white coral were scattered among the magnificent gems, and the frosted strawberry leaves of his earldom, that truly rested upon her head like a crown. She had not worn it before.

"Thorns! Helena," he said, gently.

"Yes, your mimic offerings from land and sea can wound." She spoke lightly.

"Child! child!" he murmured; "all my fortunes are at sea."

"Don't quote Mr. Shakespeare, Longleat; he makes me melancholy, as you seem to be."

"Do I, dear! You remind me of his Portia—

> 'Nor is the wide world ignorant of her worth;
> For the four winds blow in from every coast
> Renowned suitors; and her sunny locks
> Hang on her temples like a golden fleece.'"

"You are wrong, my Lord. You were my only suitor."

"Because I found my bird unfledged, and took it from the nest before its earliest summer ended. Others will see my captive to-night, and will envy me."

She rose from her kneeling posture, and said gaily,

"I too can quote—

> 'Am I your bird? I mean to shift my bush
> And then pursue me as you draw your bow:—
> You are welcome.'"

"Helena!" he seized her arm as she made him a graceful curtsey.

"Nay," she said, seeing him grave, "I jest to Oberon, to make him smile."

She pressed her lips upon his forehead, and at the risk of disarranging her dress, he clasped her in his arms in an

embrace that told her something of his deep, his tender passion. He regretted somehow just now that he had not told her the story. He half resolved to do so. And his thought was written on his face, so that she said smiling,

"Have you something on your mind, Cranford?"

This direct question surprised him. The words he meant to have spoken were not uttered. He felt his cowardice; but it triumphed.

"I have nothing, Helena."

And the tide not taken at its flow, ebbed back—never to return. He took her hands and said, "Helena, in all the future will you try to trust my love?"

"Cranford! what do you mean?"

"If ever trouble should come to us, will you believe that in these days—I mean when you look back upon them, will you then believe that I loved you, and cared for your peace? Will you try to think this, even if you blame me?"

The suspicion which she had felt sometimes, seemed to take shape in the light which his words cast. Like his friend Ross, she had fancied that Margaret Seymour had been more than friend to her husband. It was strange the two were alone united in the thought.

"Longleat," she said, "if that day should ever come, I would try to forgive you; even if you had wronged me, I would trust you."

She half hoped her words would elicit a reply that would allay her suspicion; but he did not understand her, and remained silent.

"I have now some conception of an angel," the Duchess of Alfort whispered to the Earl, when Helena was introduced to her hostess.

His pride was gratified by the admiration visible on the faces of all around; for, though high-born beauties graced the assembly, the Countess of Longleat was as

lonely in her peerless grace and loveliness as Venus among the stars.

Later in the evening, the Earl led her to a very aged lady, who seemed a relic of a bygone century, when powder and patches, high heels and fans, sedan-chairs and cards, were all in vogue. She had graced the Court of the Regent a young and lovely girl; and now she retained so much of the sparkle, and fire, and vivacity of that long-ago time, that her sallies were still enjoyed, her smart sayings echoed, and her repartees were relished by acknowledged wits. She wore the costume that had long since been deemed "a frightful fashion," but none ridiculed the venerable lady; indeed, few cared to cross a lance with her—she was sure to win and wound.

It was whispered that her history was a romance.

She had quarreled with Lord B——m, her betrothed. Both were too proud to give way; so she had ever kept her maiden name. It would be written on her tomb—"Alicia Arlington," though society called her courteously "Madame Arlington." She had spent many years in France, and had acquired a relish for the national grace at the Courts of the Tuileries and Versailles; and yet she herself was *brusque*.

"Madame," said the Earl, bowing before her, "will you allow me to introduce to you the Countess of Longleat?"

Helena looked in astonishment at the slight little figure, straight as an arrow, clothed in a green brocade stiff with gold; crowned with a white satin turban; shod with red kid slippers, that peeped forth on a hassock. She was armed with a huge gold-handled fan, a silver scent-jar, and held from her mittened fingers a satin perfumed bag.

In the midst of that modern assembly she seemed a ghost of past time.

She looked at Helena—as Helena looked at her; then she raised her eye-glass, and surveyed her from head to foot. She closed the glass with a snap.

"Ciel!" she exclaimed.

"Helena, this is Madame Arlington, a lady who——"

"Danced a minuet at her first ball," she said, "with the first gentleman in Europe."

Helena's wonder grew.

"A lady who continues to——"

"To wear the old fashions, my Lord. There! there! that will do! Mignonne! child! pretty one! sit here by my side. You are the only rosebud in these rooms—one of those soft, white, sweet rosebuds that grew in old-fashioned gardens when I was a girl. They have all gone, been plucked up, to make room for fine 'Banksias,' and 'Bourbons,' and 'Standards,' and 'Noisettes'—foreign hybrids of all kinds. Bah! England isn't England. I went to an old estate of mine the other week, and saw a gardener—old as the hills. 'John,' I said, 'this bank was covered with honeysuckle and white roses once. What is all this rubbish?' 'Please, Miss (I am a Miss, child)—please, Miss, they is all gone out. Them's the "Centifolia," an' the "Ayrshire," an' the "Multiflora." Nought else will grow now. Natur' is changed, Miss.' 'Humph! indeed! Nature isn't changed,' I said, 'but the world's on its head—that's it.' And you, child! you are just like those soft white rosebuds I used to love. It does me good to look at you. What business have *you* with those tears on your forehead? Darkness never shed them in the mines for you. You ought to wear nothing but flowers and green leaves, and live in the shine. Child, do you know how lovely you are?"

Helena blushed, and a laugh danced in her superb eyes.

"The Earl says I am, Madame."

"'The Earl says I am!' Humph! Be true to him, Mignonne—be true to him. Don't let this hollow world turn your eyes or your heart from him. Don't let the window be opened now in your summer-time. Love is a tender plant. Do you hear me, *ma petite?*"

"I hear, Madame."

"Do you understand?"

The old lady fixed her keen, piercing, dark eyes on the girl.

Helena nodded. "Yes, Madame."

"Don't call me 'Madame.' Let me hear a child's fresh voice call me once again, 'Alicia.' Say it."

She leaned her ear nearer.

Helena, half puzzled, very shy, very much amused, yet still feeling the earnestness of the strange old lady, said softly, expressively, "Alicia!"

"That's well. Child! may you never be what I am. I had neither father, nor mother, nor kin, when the only lips I ever kissed said to me, as you have said, 'Alicia.' Your eyes are his color. He never said it again. Bah! The world has grown older by nearly seventy years since then—and he is in his grave!" She fanned herself vigorously. "Who comes here? Oh, I see—the Marquis!—green as my brocade; old as the hills; every tooth paid for; and a padded chest. Ogling that pretty girl by his side as if he were twenty! Blessings on us! the man might be her lover."

"He is," said the Earl, who leaned over the back of her lounge.

"Is he!"

The old lady wet her lips, as was her custom when about to utter sharp, unwelcome truth.

"Marquis!"

The tone was too clear, too ringing, for the old lover to affect deafness.

"Madame! I am glad to see you. You—you—" with a low bow, "you, I may say——"

"Don't say it then. What's the use, when you're as near the grave as makes no matter? One step, and you are in! How's the gout? Merrion says your next attack will finish you—so, mind!"

"Madame!"

The old nobleman stared at her in horror. The haughty young beauty, leaning on his arm, looked through her drooping eyelids with ineffable disdain. She was playing for her stake—a coronet. To be exposed to this ridicule was unendurable.

"Is this your daughter, Marquis?"

"N—no—," said the confused peer; "I—I hope shortly to——"

"To give her away to some fine young gentleman, with fresh, blooming face, and whole heart; whose love, and care, and manly pride will all be laid at her feet to make her happy! Ah, I like to hear the bells ring for such a wedding as that! Don't you, Marquis? Now that we are old and withered, we can sit under the oak whose acorn we might have planted, and watch the young ones dance by; for we were young once,—weren't we, Marquis? I remember your first son's marriage. I saw your grandchildren the other day. They'll be marrying soon, Marquis. You and I must dance a minuet together then. Bah! I forgot my lameness. Well, we'll sit side by side together, and talk of old, old times. And then, when the marriage-bells cease, they'll toll for us; and the world will know that, though it seemed as if Death had forgotten us —we waited so long—at last we were at rest!"

The girl's proud lips quivered with rage as the aged lady went on so volubly, and the would-be bridegroom grinned a ghastly smile, showing the gold of his double-set; and he tried to say something about "Madame's

spirits" as he moved away. But glances of amusement had been passing from face to face, as those standing by listened, who knew that that girl was prepared to sacrifice her life for the bauble of a coronet—the empty grandeur of a title.

"There!" said Madame, as they moved on haughtily, "I've put a spoke in his wheel—planted a big bramble in her path. She won't get over it without pricking herself. Let us hope she'll see the precipice on the other side. Well, little rosebud! Mignonne!" Her voice changed to tenderness.

Mignonne looked pale, and the Earl took her to a veiled open window, in a quiet corner, and left her there with a folio of prints. She was bending over a beautiful "grape gathering," smiling to herself, as she thought of Cranford's promise to take her all through Italy farther than she had been, and completely borne from the scene around her, by this sunny vineyard, where the muscat grapes were growing and falling in ripe rich clusters to the music of a virgin's hymn perhaps, or to the sound of laughter, which would come from the parted lips of yon boy, who might have sat as model to Murillo, or passed for a descendant of the Baptist John. She was absorbed in the picture, when she was aroused by voices in a recess near to her.

"Oh, yes, his marriage is the event of the season," she heard. "He is here to-night with his bride. She is a bright, particular star, I can tell you!"

Helena smiled, wondering who this "star" might be.

"Who was she?" asked another voice.

"Davenant's daughter. Bless me, man! you might have been living in the catacombs." There was a prolonged, scarcely audible whistle.

"General Davenant's?"

"Surely. You know what a fellow he is. In addition

to his other eccentricities, he has been keeping this gem in seclusion. Longleat, like a sensible fellow, sought for his diamond in the dark, and found it by its shine. Polished, to begin with, you see."

"But she cannot be old. I was on leave from India when Davenant married Miss Clare. I was a wedding guest; how long will it be? Dash it! it makes a fellow feel the crow's feet clawing, to have to calculate so far back. About twenty years."

"May be; she is not nineteen."

"What a fellow you are, Aubrey; the idea, to condemn Davenant! His daughter was not old enough to come out. The General always was more sensible than the world said. If he had been an old fool like myself now, a pretty girl would have had all her own way, and been spoiled. I liked Davenant."

Helena's heart beat so fast, she felt suffocated. She longed to move; but she could not go through the rooms alone. She was forced to sit still, compelled to listen, for though she instinctively put her hands to her ears, they dropped tremblingly. Somehow she *feared* to hear more.

"I should like to see this bride."

"Have patience, you can't storm that citadel of silk and lace. By Jove! but there's an old friend of ours, Seymour of Bronwylfa. That fellow never will get older."

"Ah, are they here?"

"Not all of them. In fact only the youngest—a girl not yet out. The eldest son is a parson in Manchester, his sister keeps house for him. The other son has gone into the Navy."

"Ah, in Manchester! Before I went to the East I spent a few days with them. She was a splendid girl then. Why is she wasting her sweetness in a provincial town during the season?"

"Well, I can't give you the facts; but some rumours are flying about, with, I fear, too much truth. It was generally understood that Longleat was going to marry her. He was down at Ruthven for a long time last year. I heard the engagement spoken of as decided. However, after all, he saw this peerless Miss Davenant, and the sequel was a wedding."

"I don't believe it," said the other; "Longleat would never do it. He comes of an honorable stock."

"So he does; but it may have fallen to his lot to dishonor it. Appearances are against him sadly. Miss Seymour is greatly changed I do know. I called upon them as soon as the family came, and had a chat with the brown-eyed houri Miss Clara. She told me that her sister had been very delicate for some little time."

"Well, that says nothing."

"That would not if other circumstances had not seemed to tell the reason. If it be so, I for one could not forgive the Earl for depriving this season of one of its choicest belles."

"I'll never believe it of Mary Cleveland's son."

"Ah, I remember, you were attentive there once."

There was a sigh given to that "once," which for many a year had been buried deep down in the grave of hopeless love.

"Yes," he said, "if the Earl had not been before me, war would not have been my choice; but she was worthy all her happiness. God bless her! No wonder I don't believe this of her son."

"You may, I fear," said the other. "By the way, I had a letter from Glen Ross to-day."

"Ah, and how is Ross?"

"Oh, bravely. He is a splendid fellow, General. Just what he promised to be. He is about to take his seat for Henley. He'll carry all before him in the House."

"Where is he?"

"In Scotland. His uncle's death has increased his splendid fortune. Luck does follow some fellows! Here am I, a poor devil of a younger son all my life!"

"Why didn't you marry?"

"For the same reason you didn't. Couldn't get the one I wanted. So life goes! I wrote to Ross to tell him the attraction in town. You, his beau ideal of manhood in Eton days! The new and beautiful Countess."

"Has he not seen his great friend's bride?"

"No, he was abroad when Longleat married. Come along, there's an opening here."

They moved away. Helena sat still, pale and rigid, staring right before her, unmindful of the brilliant moving throng, of the sound of music, and the hum of conversation.

This then was the explanation of her husband's strange words spoken but a few hours ago! She had promised then to forgive, and to trust.

Could she do it? No, no, for he had perhaps broken Margaret's heart.

Bending her head, she burst into tears, but quickly wiped them away, and made an effort to be calm—an effort that was almost superhuman.

And Glen Ross! who was he?

It flashed upon her that he was that old college friend of whom Lord Cranford had spoken. She picked up the engravings that had fallen, and tried to banish thought until she should be alone.

"Helena, I have brought an old friend of my father's, who solicits the honor of an introduction to you."

She raised her eyes, and saw a noble-looking man, with snow-white hair, dark piercing eyes, and heavy black brows. His expression was benign; his glance at her was one of surprised admiration. Helena revered age—even

in the lowly. Rising, she bowed her head, he bent over her small white hand, and kissed it with the chivalrous grace of bygone times. He wore the uniform of a General, and many a cross and star told of victories won. It was not until he spoke that she recognized in him one of those two late speakers in the recess. He gave his arm to her, and led her through the rooms. Everywhere a way was opened in the throng for the veteran. She walked beside him pale as the moon-like gleams of her own robe. Her heart was heavy, and the old man's voice grew tenderer, as he talked to her, for he noticed her depression.

"Mignonne! white rosebud!"

They turned hastily at Madame's call.

"Ah, General, you have culled my fair blossom—the fairest in this blooming garden. Child, what is it?"

She took Helena's hands, and looked at her earnestly.

"All the sunshine gone! The dew has fallen on those violets! Earl, take her home. She is tired. Don't you see it? Don't you see it? Must your flower fade for lack of care."

Madame spoke with hasty impatience. But she whispered low and tenderly, "Little white rose, Mignonne, bend down. Will you kiss an old mummy like me?"

Helena bent down, and left a kiss on that cheek which had been kissed so long ago, by England's George the Fourth. And now our Prince of Wales was born.

Such changes the world sees!

The old lady's eyes followed her as she went away, leaning on the General's arm.

"Duchess, I shall go now," she said to her hostess. "I feel as if night had lost her stars. That child makes me sad. Her beauty moves me to tears. I am an old simpleton!"

The General gathered a flower from the conservatory,

and gave it to Helena. She came to love him so, that the flower was with her, with little Mary's gift, in a strange hour.

And when that hour had passed, he, the hero of more than one generation, the man of unblemished fame and unsullied honor, cast bitter thoughts, painful memories into Lethe's stream, dwelling on the child as she was that night; and then love and pity, hand in hand, followed her across life's troubled sea, into the calm and peaceful harbor, where forgiveness is Eternal.

CHAPTER XIII.

ALONE ON THE MOORS.

O hone a rie! O hone a rie!*
The pride of Albin's line is o'er,
And fallen Glenartney's stateliest tree;
We ne'er shall see Lord Ronald more!

"GLEEBURN TOWER" stood on the slope of "Veolan," surrounded by moors. A desolate home in the long, sharp winters, and lonely at all times; but in summer, when the scented broom shook its yellow tassels, and the whins dropped purple berries, and the fox-glove offered honeyed fingers, and soft warm winds whistled through the heather, rousing lark and lapwing to higher flight and song, — then the quaint old Tower was an enviable home. Desolate, perhaps, because in the olden time it was one of Scotland's "keeps," and now everything about it was in ruin. The moat was dry; the drawbridge was held by cankered chains, clothed with fungi, half-hidden by rank grass. The huge lion couchant, above the great entrance-gates, was mutilated into an undistinguishable something. The ivy had crept over it; over the walls, over the gates, round the towers; Nature's illustration of the charity that covereth sins! Felled trees lay across the avenues, and the once glorious gardens were a waste.

The last owner had lived and died a miser, in the only

* "Alas for the chief!"

portion of the Tower, added in later years, that was habitable. The revenues from the Gleeburn lands were immense. The only regret the Laird felt was that he could not carry them with him. Instead, they came into the possession of his nephew, Glen Ross, who was travelling northwards that November night when he called upon Mr. Edward Seymour in Edgware Street.

He arrived in the dark night, and knew nothing of Gleeburn, or of its condition; nothing of the great trees that lay rotting in the avenues; of the weed-choked gardens; of the bonnie glens in the park that were inaccessible for rank grass, nettles, and fungi; of the old "burn" that baptised the Tower, which never shone silvery in the sun, and never wimpled clear notes of music, because of the vast heaps of decayed vegetation which the Laird of the soil had suffered to accumulate, and lie in it undisturbed. All he knew was, that Gleeburn was in part a picturesque ruin, which his uncle, in a sarcastic letter before death, had bid him "do his duty by and repair!"

A shaky vehicle, like a dilapidated bread-cart, met him at the station, some miles off, and he was driven (unknowingly to himself) to the servants' side door, for it was many years since the principal entrance had been opened. He was met there by Malcolm, of whom he had childish remembrances, and who had been Gleeburn's faithful retainer all his life, bearing with the stinginess of the dead Laird, because he was a Ross, and the master of the Tower.

It was a pretty sight, too, that met the eye from the windows on the following morning, though very wintry. Snow lay on the bare trees, in the gaps, on the uneven ground, and glistened whitely in the round, red sun. Within, it was cheerful—yea, cosy, for in a small, snug-looking room a fire was crackling and blazing with right good will; and we all know what an air of comfort a fire

can give to the meanest cottage. There was certainly not much luxury here. Every chair might have been a collection of joined corbels—they were all nobs and grinning heads, and ugly twists. There was not a picture on the walls; but antlers of stag and moose hung there. And over the high chimney-shelf were fowling-pieces and a couple of crossed swords. On either side, in recesses, was a queer old book-case, with glass doors and faded red curtains, of the kind that gives so much trouble when a book is wanted, that you first bargain with yourself if it be worth your while—which it was not in this case, as all the volumes were of ancient date, by non-celebrated authors, and upon subjects which a reader in search of amusement would find far from inviting.

The centre of the room was covered by a well-worn Turkey carpet; on the hearth was a superb black fox-skin, in the window a white bear's, which gave a look of richness to the apartment. The breakfast-table was well spread, and the antique silver service for once sparkled in the firelight. A magnificent retriever had stretched himself upon the fox, and lay blinking his beautiful brown eyes in the warm glow. A white-haired serving-man stooped to pat him. "Hector" lazily raised his head to meet the caress, but soon put it down again with a self-satisfied snore. And then old Malcolm coaxed the fire, and wondered aloud when Mr. Glen "wad be stirrin'."

At that moment, a firm tread on the stairs, and a clear whistle, were heard. Hector started up, cocked his ear in a listening attitude, and went to the door with Malcolm; his huge tail waved with delight, as his master entered with a cheery,—

"Holloa, old fellow! how do you find yourself this morning?" to which Hector responded by opening his immense jaws for a good yawn. A true canine response to a polite inquiry! Mr. Ross laughed, and turned to the servant.

"Well, Malcolm, you aren't a day older in looks. Here's a northern winter! What in the world is a fellow to do with the snow breast-high? I supposé the place is more than in ruins—tumbling down."

"Nane sae verra bad, Measter Glen. The hoose is a' richt; but ye wull care for the auld place, sir, for the sake o' the deid. Your faither lo'ed it weel, Measter Glen. I mind your comin' a baby, sir, ance."

"A baby, eh," said Mr. Glen, smiling, and looking down at his long straight legs, as if their ever having been the property of anything so small was a droll idea.

Malcolm lingered in the room under the pretext of rearranging little table matters, already perfect.

"Did my uncle name me to you before he died?" inquired Mr. Ross.

Malcolm looked grave and shook his head.

"The auld measter wud na thole* to hear your verra name, sir. Was na 't waefu',† an' him gangin' his lane to the ither warld? I grat for sic a sair sicht in the deid-thraws.‡ He deid in the lown§ o' the gloamin',‖ an' niver a freen' or ane o' his ain kin was near by to shut the een that wad niver see mair. He withered like a windle-strae¶ on the hills, Measter Glen, an' nane but auld Malcolm felt a heart-stoun or heaved a sich. There was a sugh in the trees that swoopit the bit late leaves doun as he deid; an' sic like soun's; but nane ither i' the chaumer. Waes me!"

"It was his own fault, Malcolm."

"Ay, Measter Glen. But the deid is iver sacred. I ca' to mind the time your mither was here, sir. It was a fine simmer's day, and she ganged richt awa' to Glencome, alane in the het sun, to see the grave o' the auld

* Endure. † Sorrowful. ‡ Death-agony. § Calm.
‖ Evening. ¶ A grass.

Laird. She stayed i' the cauld kirk too lang, and verra sune they laid her there beside him. Ye were a creenklin' bairn in the creddle, sir, an' I grat for ye, that your ain mither had gane, and had nae grave i' her ain countra. Scotland was strange to her, puir leddy! Ye were ower soon baith faitherless and mitherless, sir."

"I was, Malcolm; and you know my uncle kept me aloof."

"Ay, sir, he was nane weel-faured to ye; but he's gane."

"And the old feud with him," said Mr. Ross. "Now I am the last of all the race."

"Nane for lang, Measter Glen," answered the old man, briskly, his keen, frosty blue eye lighting up. "Gin ye bring nae bride frae your ain land we hae bonnie maidens i' Scotland, sir, that wad mak' the auld Tower blythe. We luk for her, sir."

"Do you?" said his master, laughing. "I fear no lady will condescend to humour my bachelor fancies. Then, I am very particular, Malcolm."

"It wad be a pity gin ye were na, sir, an' ye sae braw wi' God's gude gifts!" He looked at Glen admiringly as he left the room.

Mr. Ross leaned against the quaint mantel-piece, all carved over with queer faces, which he never saw, for his eyes were fixed on the snow outside; but he must have been thinking of Malcolm's words, for suddenly rousing himself, he pushed Hector playfully with his foot, and said aloud—

"Shall we try and find her, old boy? You and I in search of the beautiful unknown, with violet eyes and locks of gold! Eh, Hector?"

Hector sniffed his master's feet, and licked his master's hand; and Glen laughed, and said, "It is a bargain, old fellow."

"Malcolm, I see no letters," he said, as the man entered with breakfast.

"Dear sir, nae; we fear the post is snawed up. It's a walkin' post," he explained, "an' in weather like this it's often sae."

"Do you mean to say that my letters and 'Times' are at the mercy of a snow-drift and a pair of legs?"

"I'm fearin' sae, sir," said Malcolm, apologetically. "Ye ken it's oot o' the way."

His master had nothing to do but make the most of his breakfast hour. His solicitor and steward were each unable to see him that day, the latter being ill. He had just discovered two pleasant circumstances: one, the character of the literature on the book-shelves; the other, that his valet had neglected to pack up a single volume. If Glen Ross's temper had not been of the finest, he might have given utterances which could not have been recorded. As it was, he fed Hector with dainty bits, took more breakfast than usual, and afterwards set off on an exploring expedition through the western part of the Tower. He rambled on, stumbling sometimes over huge stones, everywhere seeing the bright steelly sky through the broken roof-tree, where so many generations of one side his line had lived and died. His maternal great-grandmother was a Scotchwoman. She married a Celt, and brought him, as her wedding portion, the rich lands of Gleeburn. They were entailed property, and as such had fallen to the inheritance of Glen's uncle, now to his own. No younger son could inherit them; in case the heir had no issue, they went to the Crown. And so, as he stood on a wide stone window sill, clinging to the ivy for support, gazing round on the far-away expanse of pure snow, again the thought that he was the last came, and he was sad in his loneliness. His mother lay in the vault at Glencome, his father 'mid the Irish hills. The

wide sea parted the two graves of his own household, and he himself had none to care for him.

Perhaps you who read this are living in some bonnie home, amid the glens and braes of Scotland, with the heathery hills for your rovings; and there is not a day, yea, not an hour, in which you can be lonely, for loving ones join your ramblings over moor and glen, and knowe, and think even your "clishmaclaver"* clever because of their own love. Or, may be, you dwell among the warm hearts and silver tongues of dear old Ireland, and there your name is spoken as tenderly as if it were a note of music to be sung; and neither morning dawn nor evening glimmer fade without a kindly prayer for you from lips of kin. Or yours may be one of England's happy homes. There you have your own place beside the hearth-stone, and your own dear ones, whose eyes brighten for your coming, and fill with tears when you go. If so, you can scarcely understand Glen's feelings on this winter's morning, as he stood beneath the ruined tower. But one, perchance, will read these lines whose loneliness in life has taught him to feel why so much tender goodness lies in God's command, "Love the stranger."

Mr. Ross shook off his depression, and whistled to Hector, who answered by a bark in the distance, and then came plunging and leaping, scattering the snow in clouds. Off they started together, leaving a long track of footsteps in the dreary waste of white land—right away over the moor to Glencome.

Mr. Ross was on the moors until the stars came out in the deep purple, and the "Milky Way" trailed its silver fleece over heaven's plains. The sugh sounded eerily through the ruins as he passed them; and there was a gloom in their shadows that made the light welcome when he entered the hall. During his absence, the front entrance

* Idle talk.

had been opened, and he saw at once that the arrival of some of his English servants, had made a difference in the drear place. Old Malcolm could not conceal his relief on seeing his master, whose long ramble had given him anxiety.

Three or four weeks had passed over when one night, after a ride of many miles, he came to the Tower, gloomy and numb with cold. He had had neither letter nor paper for three days. Malcolm's kindly face met him, and in his hand was a full letter-bag. The alacrity with which his master opened it testified his delight. Truly Glen Ross was not formed for obscure retirement.

"The best wine for the last," he said aloud, as his eye fell on one from the Earl of Longleat. He laid it aside, and read his business correspondence. Then after he had dined, he wheeled his chair to the hearth, and with his feet upon Hector, before a blazing fire, the lamp at his elbow, and the room made all snug, he broke the seal.

He was rather an epicure over that letter.

"The same sensitive, dreamy fellow you ever were, Longleat!" was his only comment, as he folded the epistle with a smile. Then he sat thinking, with his head thrown back, his eyes fixed on the red fire, never losing the half-sad, half-thoughtful look which he had worn all day. Suddenly he drew a writing-table nearer to his side, and commenced a letter.

"GLEEBURN TOWER,
"*January 21st*, 18—

"DEAR LONGLEAT,—

"You little thought what a boon you were conferring on your old chum, when you sent your New Year's greeting. For the late few weeks I have been daily reminded by myself of 'the last man.' Nothing but the slender post-link connects me with the chain of

humanity, and that the frost has often snapped. Truly I have attained to the Paradisiacal state—

> The world forgetting,
> By the world forgot.

I had no conception, with all my travels north, south, east and west (and I think I have been everywhere excepting to heaven and hell) that there existed, in this overcrowded world, a place so lonely, so desolate as Gleeburn Tower. Corn-laws and strikes are agitating Parliament and Commerce, but here the snow lies for miles and miles untrodden; the noisiest voices are those of wimplin' becks; the highest excitement, 'wull there be mair snaw the morn?' Can you picture me in such a place? I was reading last night one of Hogg's quaint passages, and I really wondered if such a scene could be enacted (such creatures of habit are we!) See what he says: 'After the cloth has been drawn, the dining-room begins to murmur like a hive o' honey-bees after a' the drones are dead; and though a' present hae stings, nane ever think o' usin' them, but in genial employment are busy in the sunshine o' sociality wi' probosces and wings.' I laid down the book to try and realize the possibility of such a scene. This Tower and its lands have fallen to me through the death of that misanthropical uncle, of whom I talked at college. I don't remember ever seeing him. He was my father's elder brother, and he owed him a deadly grudge, because he first loved my mother, and she rejected him. There was an attempt at reconciliation on the part of my father after my birth. He came with my mother to Gleeburn, and, strange to say, she died, and was buried here. My father went away on his travels, and he never met his brother again. And I have been that brother's next heir! He never would see me, because I was their child. What a mighty power, Longleat, this love must have, which can

strengthen animosity year after year, and nurse revenge when Death himself has sealed the lives of the victors! My uncle could not prevent the Tower from falling into my hands, but he neglected the place. I am inclined to think with a purpose, for in a sarcastic codicil to his will, he advises me to put the Tower in repair. If you saw it you would laugh. A great portion is as habitable as Conway Castle.

"The shooting is fine here; but, as you know, I am not a sportsman by taste. You would smile to see me surveying half-demolished walls with an eye to architectural plans. My rambles are all on lonely moors, where I often long for your companionship. It is annoying to me to be kept here just now. I pant to enter the arena. What are you doing? My 'Times' gives me no tidings of you, and this, Longleat, is not the age for idlers. The help of every man, who cries 'All Hail! to Progress,' is needed. But you ever were a lazy fellow. I suppose you are enthralled by love. No doubt your captivity is sweet.

"Your present letter leads me to believe that a former one miscarried. I do not quite understand what you mean by calling the Countess my old acquaintance. We are perfect strangers I am convinced, inasmuch as the glowing descriptions of her loveliness, received by me occasionally, answer to no face I ever saw, excepting perhaps that of my divinity, for whose advent I am waiting.

"I am sometimes inclined to contrast your life with mine; and then I confess I am also inclined to grumble. And yet there is an undertone in your letter, which makes me fancy that even you have some ground for knowing that this life is not all smooth. My own loneliness often oppresses me. I cannot, as you know, make many friends. Why not marry? you will say. Justly so. My answer is that I am waiting for the unknown. I am formed for domestic life, with all my ambition and taste for politics;

and yet I am the last red ember on the household hearth! I can picture you just now, with your dear mother (tell her her adopted son sends his greeting) and your wife so happy, that you will laugh when you read the moonings of a bachelor, who, in his moor-home hears no sound but the wind's prelude to a storm, meets no answering look, but that of his favorite hound; but unless your heart be colder than of old, you will, after all, feel sympathy with him. As a rule, to feel for others, we must first have felt much for ourselves: therefore, it is putting a great deal down to your account of original goodness to believe you will feel for me."

Here Mr. Ross laid down his pen, stirred the fire to flames, drew his chair close to it, and sat lazily gazing therein, until—will romance pardon the fact?—until his head drooped, and he fell fast asleep.

Two hours and a half passed in rambling dreams when he wakened to find Hector on a snoring expedition, and Malcolm by his side, apparently undecided what to do with the fire that was fast dying out.

His master looked at his watch. "Twelve, I declare. And I am as cold as death. What's the night, Malcolm?"

"Weel, sir, gin there was a million geese pluckit an' flaffin'* feathers could na flee mair, nor thicker; I combt ben‡ an' durstna beet the fire. Ye were sleepin' in your cheyre sae caum. Hae I done weel, Measter Glen? Are ye cauldrife?"

"I don't know what you mean, Malcolm."

"I'm meanin' wull ye catch cauld?"

"Not I," said his master, laughing; "I'm tough as a custock. Do ye ken what that means?"

Malcolm smiled. "Your tongue's ower siller for the Scotch. It's mair music i' its tone than ony I iver harrd."

* Fluttering in the air. † Came. ‡ Into the room.

Again his master smiled. "Snowing, eh! No post to-morrow, I fear."

He closed the letter to the Earl with Malcolm's addition; then took his candle, and, followed by Hector, went up the broad staircase, and cold gloomy passages towards his room. It was true enough, the blinding flakes drifted down thick and fast, as he saw by the light of the lamps over the entrance seen from the staircase. Beyond, all was dreary darkness. He had that peculiar sensitiveness of hearing, which such a night of stillness gives. As he entered his room he fancied he heard a distant cry. He stopped. Hector at his feet, also listened, with his ears cocked. Suddenly he gave a low growl. Mr. Glen Ross went forward quickly and threw open the window. The noiseless shower was falling, falling, falling through the darkness without rest. The keen air chilled him to the bone, and the white flakes drifted upon his bare head as he leaned out.

"Fancy," he said aloud, and was drawing in, when the cry again sounded. He gave answer, "Ho, there!"

The voice cried back; it seemed a wail for help.

His valet entered. "Sir," he said, "those are the owls in the west tower."

"Nonsense," said his master, "some one is lost on the moor."

"Indeed, sir, it is only the owl-hoot," answered the man, respectfully. "Will you come to this window, sir?"

He threw open one on the tower side. They listened. There could be no mistake; it was a veritable screech.

"Confound the bird," said Mr. Ross, "I'll shoot him to-morrow."

The man smiled. "The old house-keeper, sir, has been sayin' it's ill luck to the house when the owls hoot so."

"Has she?" said his master, carelessly. "Is that one of her dotings?"

He was soon asleep; and Gleeburn Tower was quiet and dark in the midst of the shrouded moors.

"Dotin's', did he ca' 'em?" snarled that same old dame, long after, when in the hush of another snowy night she spread her skinny fingers over the flaming faggots, listening to the owl again; whilst old Malcolm, pale and dismayed, wrung his hands with a bitter cry—

"My master! my master! the last of his race, the last!"

Ten days afterwards Glen Ross was posting over the moor, on his journey farther north. He looked back as the carriage reached the top of a brow, where he knew he should lose sight of Gleeburn. He called to the postillions to stop. It was early morning. There had been a splendid sunrise. Two bright bars of gold and purple were above the Tower; behind was a soft crimson flush, that trailed far away towards Glencome, where his mother lay. It was a singular sky, and very beautiful. The red sun was fast twinkling to a brighter, paler glory, and all over the moors —over the far-distant hill-belt the blinding snow lay pure and spotless—in death-like arranged reposed and stillness.

Mr. Ross took a long lingering look. Then came the chime from the great clock in the turret; just one note had struck, sounding over the moor, it was followed by a crashing noise. The post-boys turned in their saddles. One rose in his stirrup, and pointed with his whip in great excitement.

"The clock bell wull ne'er ring mair," he said; "it's fallen the morn, an' see, see! the stanes, an' braw ivy wull coom doun wi' it!"

Surely, the old clock had sounded its own knell, for all the turret was gone excepting one bit of wall, left standing against the background of sky.

A cry of dismay burst from Glen's lips.

"No one would be hurt there, sir," said his servant.

"No! drive on, boys."

Away they dashed.

It seemed as if that one stroke had severed the Tower from Glen Ross, for Gleeburn never saw its Laird again.

* * * * *

A few days after the Duchess of Alfort's assembly, Helena was in her boudoir, when Cranford entered hastily.

"Have you any engagement to-night?" he asked.

"I have none but those you share," she answered quietly, without looking at him. "To-night is mamma's."

The Dowager looked up from a letter she was reading.

"My love, don't mind that. It was very pretty and kind to propose to devote one evening to me in the week; but another will do as well."

"I like to keep to one, mamma," she said, "then you are sure of it."

"Since when has my bonnie become so methodical?" asked the Earl.

It was scarcely perceptible, but she did turn her head aside from his touch.

Helena had been very quiet, and had looked very thoughtful during the last few days; but Cranford had not alluded to the change.

"Mother," he said, bending over her chair, "ten thousand pardons. I forgot your highness received this evening."

She met his laughing eyes with great fondness. She had only been thinking an hour ago that she rarely saw his smile now, and here it was.

"Granted, my son, and an absolution for to-night also. This dear child is so unselfish. Where is it you wish to take her?"

Helena was flushed with bending over some work, and her eyes had a soft, liquid expression of languor.

"If she look like that," he answered, gaily, "I will not take her any where. It would be cruelty to others."

His mother laughed.

"Cranford, don't be absurd. Where is it you are going?" Helena asked.

"And what has put you in such spirits, my boy?" asked the Dowager, at the same time.

"Do you hear that, my Lady Countess? I, your liege lord, am not supposed to have passed to the dignity of manhood."

"I wish you would pass the rubicon of mystery, Cranford, and explain."

"Well, your Ladyship, where do I wish to take you? To Willis's Rooms. For what? A meeting on education. Why am I in such spirits, my lady mother? Because I expect to hear an old friend who has just arrived in town."

Helena started.

"Even so, my darling. What does that bird-like wonder mean?"

"Who is the friend?" inquired his mother.

"Guess."

"I can't, my dear."

"I can," said Helena, laying aside her work; "Mr. Glen Ross."

The Earl's face expressed his wonder now.

"Where have you heard his name?"

"At the Duke's the other night."

She did not look at Cranford, and her voice trembled a little.

"And what more?" he asked.

"Much, my Lord, very much. I am writing to Miss Seymour to-day. Have you any message?" She said this pointedly.

It was so impossible not to perceive that there was something unusual and unnatural in Helena's manner

that both Cranford and his mother looked at her inquiringly.

The color, to the Earl's own vexation, rushed into his face.

"I," he said, "I have no message."

"Has anything troubled you, my dear?" the Dowager asked.

Helena's smile was sweet, and her voice very different in its inflection as she answered—

"Nothing has troubled me, mamma, but Margaret's sad state of health."

She left the room, and her husband puzzled his brain in the vain endeavour to understand what Helena meant. They did not meet until evening.

The room was so nearly filled when the Earl and Countess entered, that there were only a few vacant stalls in front of the platform. The meeting was one of great interest: it was the first of the kind which the Countess had attended, and she looked round curiously, acknowledging the recognitions of her friends with her accustomed grace. Cranford had playfully told her to "look her best;" he thought she had well obeyed his behest. Many beautiful women were there, distinguished by that indescribable air of refinement which is to be found in such perfection in no other land save ours; but he was instinctively conscious that the flower of them all was his own. She was dressed with elegant simplicity, and never had her loveliness seemed to him so pure, so ethereal.

The platform filled, and the meeting commenced; but the Earl saw no signs of his friend. At last he grew impatient, and, during a short pause, he turned round to ask the Duke of Alfort if Mr. Ross were coming. A sudden burst of applause arrested his voice; he turned his head quickly. Glen was crossing the platform, and the cheer which was raised at the first glimpse of him, went through

the whole room, and did not cease until he had taken his seat, and was busily engaged in answering the welcomes of those around him.

He was as pale as ever, but the greeting gave an indescribable expression to his countenance. His eyes were kindled with excitement, and there was a smile upon his firm mouth which the Earl knew so well.

"Who is that?" whispered Helena.

Lord Cranford gave her a meaning look, which she understood in an instant.

"Ah!" She slightly raised her brows. "Is it so?" She looked at Mr. Ross attentively.

And this was her introduction to that "old college friend."

Although the Earl sat immediately below him, some time passed before Mr. Ross saw him. It was not, indeed, until it was near his time to speak. Their eyes met with a mutual glance of pleasure. Glen's were glowing like burning coals, with the excitement of surprise. His heart —that affectionate, great heart!—was beating rapidly with joy. The love of those two friends "passed the love of women." Suddenly he remembered his resolution; it was nearly time to speak. He had been hard at work since his arrival in town; he felt jaded, out of sorts, indisposed for mental exertion this evening; and yet he had the consciousness that much was expected from him. He scanned the audience, resting his elbow on the back of his seat, leaning his brow upon his hand. He began to dream as he tried to fix his thoughts upon his subject. "Confound it!" he thought, "I must trust to the moment. What ails me to-night?"

He ran his fingers through his long dark hair, and took out his watch hastily. His eye met the Earl's, who was smiling at these familiar signs of the old impetuous spirit. Mr. Ross smiled back too. Cranford saw the

smile, then, its sudden arrest. Glen's eyes had fallen upon Helena, and his expression was so startling that the Earl looked at her.

No wonder that Mr. Ross was startled; she was at the moment so especially like her portrait which he possessed. There was the same dreamy look in the eyes, the same expression on the lips, the same purity on the brow, the same shell tint on the cheeks, the same golden rippling hair. It was indeed the "beautiful unknown," found in life at last!

An indescribable feeling came over the Earl; instinctively he laid his hand upon hers, though he could not have told why. It was a sort of assurance to himself that she was his.

"Who is that lady beside the Earl of Longleat?" inquired Mr. Ross of one near to him.

The gentleman glanced his eye along the line of faces. "That! Oh, don't you know? She is the Countess, the most beautiful woman in London."

It seemed to Glen Ross that his heart ceased beating; outwardly he was perfectly cool.

"Thank you," he said.

"How is it you do not know her?"

"I have been travelling so long." The answer was given a little impatiently; but recollecting himself, he said, "Excuse me, I am horribly bothered to-night. I cannot get my thoughts into the right track."

He leaned forward, and whispered to the chairman, "If my name stands next, will you change it, for I *must* go to the committee-room."

"Don't be long," answered the chairman, "the meeting is already impatient for you."

He went down to an ante-room, locked the door, and paced to and fro rapidly. He was in a fever, though again and again he called himself "a fool." He had not

guessed until now how deeply he had cherished the dream of one day meeting his ideal, whose beauty had not so entranced him as the exquisite purity of her face had satisfied his soul, though he *had* professed to laugh at the artist's assurance that it was the portrait of a living girl, and though he had jested upon the idea of finding her. Now he knew that the hope had been a real one to him.

And she was the wife of his friend! One look had sufficed to tell him how infinitely higher than the painter's skill was her loveliness. At the moment of his seeing her her eyes were full of earnest thought, and there was that same tender shade of sadness on her lips that the artist had caught, but not given with half the tenderness of life. He had called her his "divinity;" and now that he had seen her, he knew that there was in her face a something that was almost divine, so spiritual, in the truest sense of the word, was her beauty. It was a rude awaking from a beautiful dream to a painful reality.

"He has wronged and deceived me," he said aloud. "Oh, Longleat, I could not have dealt so treacherously with you."

He smiled at himself in his bitterness; and with a keen regret for the past, a strange indescribable pain, he returned to the platform.

The Earl saw him come back, he was looking for him anxiously; he feared, having seen Glen's look, what might follow. He wished now that he had replaced the letter that had miscarried. "And yet it is all an absurdity to suppose that Ross thought seriously of the picture," he said to himself naturally—as a man would say; but when he looked on Glen's face, so altered in a few moments—it was so white; when he saw his dark eyes gazing on Helena with such an unconsciously sad expression, he knew something of the truth. And his regret deepened.

Helena's face brightened as Mr. Ross returned. Glen saw it, and never in all his life had a woman's smile thrilled him before.

It gave him nerve and calmness. There was that expectant settling of the audience, that waiting hush, after the burst of applause which his name called forth, when Mr. Ross rose, which might have told a stranger that he was popular in London.

"What a noble fellow he looks!" said the Earl half to himself, half to Helena.

"I never saw so powerful a face," she whispered, "but it is a very singular one." The next moment for the first time she heard the clear rich voice which filled every part of the room.

He took a rapid but very comprehensive survey of Europe, particularly comparing Germany with Scotland. He contrasted the continental system of compulsory education with the indifference of England, and gave jail statistics, Government reports, and notes from the records kept by a private society, until the mass of evidence which he produced of the amount of ignorance, of the utter ignorance, which prevailed among the lower classes, appalled his audience, most of whom had never given a moment's thought to the subject. Then he came to London, and very clearly showed how much had yet to be done in the mightiest city of the world. For more than an hour he held the heart of the assembly which consisted of the highest in every sense of the term, for the nobility of intellect as of rank was gathered in the room that night.

Death-like silence prevailed as one moment he roused the indignation of his hearers, then called forth a smile by his grotesque anecdotes, for certainly squalor and ignorance have their grotesque aspect. There were low murmurs of applause now and again; but interest speedily

hushed them. It was no rhetorical display, no mere effort of genius or of memory. Glen Ross went to that meeting as the advocate of the destitute; the defender of those who were left without helpers; and he forgot himself so completely in his theme, that he did not even know how much he was moving the hearts of those around him. At last, hastily glancing at his watch, and throwing down his roll of papers on the table, he said,

"Sir,—We have been speaking upon this noble theme of progress as if it were a new thing. It is not. Has it not been the watchword of the world from the hour when light was born, to now—when science reverently, with knee on earth, and eye in heaven, scans the pathway of its stars, counts its rolling orbs, and foretells the eclipses of its suns; from the days when the first Adam mused in the shades of Eden, to now, when science stoops to classify the tiniest mosses in the crag-cleft, and the mightiest trees that wave in Tropic lands; from the days when Arcadian shepherds piped melodies through simple reeds, to now, when a listening world sits at the feet of masters on sweet instruments, and learns by foretaste one occupation of the skies; from the days when costly parchment rolls were the world's sole library, to now, when every humble cottage may boast its lettered shelves. In art, the first crude sketches have grown into galleries of treasures, rude moulds of clay into the graces of Canova or the Apollo of Belvidere. Travel is no longer a question of distance, or of time; the horse is outstripped in speed; and the time is coming, when the camel may return to its freedom, no longer, even in the desert, the needful servant of mankind. When we consider the grandeur of man's God-like powers; the magnificence of his past achievements; the marvels of his discoveries, the perseverance of his researches—we cannot wonder if in our later times fresh challenges be given to each other by rulers in the realm of mind. He

plays with the lightnings of heaven, and guides the helm in the storm. He discovers shores unknown, and wins a fortune from the prairie wild. The pearl in the sea, and the gem in the mine, he gathers as a child its flowers, and traffics in the ore that lies beneath the hills.

"The cry is no longer, 'Watchman, tell us of the night,' for light is spreading. The Promethean fire is passing from hand to hand. Yet, there are thousands to whom the star that burns, the spar that glitters, the tree that waves, the flower that blooms, are all equal mysteries, to whom the book-world is sealed; and who know nothing of themselves. Were it not for this evil, there would be no class to whom the word 'degraded' could be applied. Sir, the ignorant noble in the nineteenth century would not have the reception on this platform which would greet the peasant whose cultured intellect had raised him to the rank of the literati and the scientific. The day is past in England when a patrician name commanded homage without patrician learning, without the soul's nobility. The world unites to honor mind in this our day, because the world has seen and proved that knowledge alone is power. I see around me members of both Senate Houses; merchants who are princes in commerce; and some yonder on whom daily labour has set its stamp—a stamp, sir, that shows the metal to be true gold. When I see these, and remember that England has known the days when the crook and the mitre ruled supreme, I hail the dawn of better things. We have met to band ourselves for one great object—the raising of our people. We are a chain of links which must encircle the land, gathering in every hamlet, and every dale. The Universe is God's parish; the Bible was written for the world: 'Our Father' was the key-note of the Redeemer's prayer.

"In that prayer we learn the lesson of great and comprehensive undertakings; and they are all signs to us. Let

us so act that, as a people, we shall walk before the Great Intelligences, who, bending from their world of grand mysteries, shall watch our every footstep—until, with eagerness, they crown us victors in the great crusade against national ignorance and sin."

As Mr. Ross sat down, he glanced at Helena. She was looking at him with an intense, rapt gaze. He saw that her thoughts were not of him, but of his subject. Her cheeks burned; her eyes glittered. She started as the Earl, bending down, whispered to her; and she said something which made him smile. Then she turned towards Mr. Ross again, and with a look, which he almost construed into a recognition of her husband's friend, and to which he felt inclined for an instant to respond, she rose and left the room, leaning upon her husband's arm.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLD AND NEW FRIENDSHIPS.

Oh, to see or hear her singing! Scarce I know which is divinest—
For her looks sing too—she modulates her gestures on the tune;
And her mouth stirs with the song, like song; and when the notes are finest,
'Tis the eyes that shoot out vocal light, and seem to swell them on.

Then we talked—oh, how we talked! her voice, so cadenced in the talking,
Made another singing—of the soul! a music without bars—
While the leafy sounds of woodlands, humming round where we were walking,
Brought interposition worthy-sweet—as skies about the stars.

LADY GERALDINE'S COURTSHIP.

Two or three days after the meeting, Helena was in her morning-room, finishing a letter, when the Earl rapped at the door, and entered.

"I am so glad you have come, Cranford," she said, "for I have had an opiate this morning, and want a refreshing ride."

"An opiate?"

"Yes, an interminable visit from Miss Clarendon."

Helena looked up laughing, and saw——Mr. Ross! In an instant cheek and brow were scarlet.

"Pardon me, Lady Cranford. This intrusion, on my part, was unpremeditated."

He spoke with such cold gravity, that she thought it was also distasteful to him.

"Is it necessary to introduce you?" asked the Earl, who seemed to be in wild spirits.

Mr. Ross did not reply. The Countess, however, said, "Scarcely. As my husband's oldest and dearest friend, you are not quite a stranger to me, Mr. Ross. I am very pleased to see you."

Such a blending of simplicity with graceful ease and dignity, Mr. Ross had never seen. The touch of her hand was an electric thrill to him; yet so constrained was his greeting, she seemed to feel its chill for long after.

The past three days had been to him almost like a dream. He had, for his own reasons, avoided Lord Cranford; but they had accidentally met this morning, and nothing could have withstood the Earl's exuberant joy on seeing him. And so Glen found himself in Eglinton House—in spite of his secret determination to the contrary. How could it indeed be otherwise? He himself felt how absurd it would be to make his past fancy, through the possession of a picture, the cause of estrangement between himself and his dearest friend on earth; and yet, so sensitive was Glen's honor, that more than once he had resolved to tell that friend the whole truth—even at the risk of rendering himself amenable to ridicule. For it did seem ridiculous that he should have set his heart on meeting with the original of the portrait. But truth is stranger than fiction, and it was even so.

When he so unexpectedly entered her presence, the torrent of past hoarded feeling rushed over him; but he was calm outwardly—even constrained and cold. Lord Cranford saw it, and, guessing the reason, felt that he was to blame. His manner changed from gaiety to earnestness; and soon the two friends were talking of the old days at college, when they speculated upon the future, and never dreamed of the realities which had to come.

Mr. Ross thought, as he looked round the exquisite boudoir, that, had he heard nothing of its mistress, he could have told that it belonged to a beautiful woman. Philosophers and stoics may moralize upon personal loveliness as they will, but it has a subtle and refining influence upon all the surroundings of its possessor.

She sat quiet, occupied apparently with some trifling employment, but in reality she was scanning Mr. Ross—a fact of which he was no doubt conscious, for he startled her by suddenly asking if she were "taking another opiate?"

"No, Mr. Ross," she answered, with a frankness that pleased him. "There is too much galvanism in your conversation for that."

"Yet, pardon me. Was it not conversation that had such an effect upon you?"

"I admit it, for it was a one-sided one. Miss Clarendon is a silent person."

"Don't you like silent people?" he asked, with an amused glance at the Earl.

"I like people who *can* be silent; but I confess to an objection against the non-conversational. They are like dry wells."

"And yet, were I to judge your Ladyship by your own sanctum, I should conclude that you derive many of your pleasures from silent friends."

He glanced at the books which covered two sides of the room.

"Then, I think you would come to an erroneous conclusion through a false estimate, sir, inasmuch as I cannot admit that I do hold a one-sided conversation with those companions. Their voices may be mute, but their utterances are not."

"Don't you get into an argument with that lady," said the Earl, laughing; "she is so fond of fine distinctions

that she splits hairs into invisible nothings, and then quarrels with you for not seeing them."

Mr. Ross waited for her reply.

"You know, Cranford, woman's perceptions are so keen she does not wait for processes; hence she is impatient with dullness."

Glen went to the books with a peculiar smile at the Earl, and took down volume after volume.

"Well, Mr. Ross?" she asked, presently.

"I beg your pardon, my Lady; am I taking a liberty?"

"Not at all. But I wait your verdict."

It was quite true that he had been seeking some clue to her character through her library, and his fastidious taste was thoroughly satisfied.

"I observe one most womanly trait—you are fond of poetry."

"I am, in defiance of the definition that 'poetry is reason in a blaze;' but if it indeed be so, I maintain that the fire is Promethean." The slight emphasis showed her intended allusion.

"You have a friend here whose voice is not mute," he said, standing before her harp. "I never see this instrument without being reminded of St. John in Patmos, and the land he saw; for, without being professedly religious, I have a strong love for the sacred writings. If we want the sublimity of poetry, the highest grandeur of thought, we find them in perfection in the utterances of the prophets. Who, among our modern bards, has attained the altitude of Isaiah or of Job? I am glad to see that you are fond of theology. There is no study which is such a trainer of thought."

"Helena, fond of theology!" exclaimed Cranford, "I never knew that."

"Then have I discovered more in half an hour than you

have in—how long?" said Mr. Ross, smiling. "Is music a favorite art with you, Lady Cranford?"

"I am not a Saint Cecilia, Mr. Ross," she replied; at the same moment, to his surprise, she rose, and began to tune her harp.

"Unlike most ladies, you render your music more acceptable by bestowing it generously;" he said this seriously; she knew he meant tribute, not compliment.

"What shall I play, Cranford?" she asked.

"All your music is good, my birdie."

His voice was very tender, as he went up to his young wife. Mr. Ross turned aside, for, alas! now that he saw her at home he felt more keenly the loss of that past sweet hope. Whilst he was standing before the window, her voice rose clear and melodious; and in another moment he was asking himself where he had heard the words. This morning Helena's voice was unusually sweet and powerful —almost too thrilling in its passionate feeling. As the song ceased, Mr. Ross turned and went to her side.

"You may not be Saint Cecilia, Lady Cranford, but were I Ulysses I should need the bands in passing your isle. What is the name of that song?"

"The words were written by a friend of Cranford's, Mr. Ross. I set them to music."

It flashed upon him that they were his own; but the sweetness of her voice had so added to the charm of his lines that he had failed to recognize them.

"By the way, who did write them, Longleat?"

"You have been singing to the author, Helena."

She looked at Mr. Ross quickly.

"It is too bad, Lady Cranford," he said, laughing rather confusedly.

"I was not aware," she began, then stopped.

"Or you would have given me something better," he continued.

"No, indeed, I like that song better than all I know, excepting 'The Land o' the Leal.'"

"Do you? Why?" he asked, curious to know her reason.

"It has the charm of association apart from its merits."

There was that pretty, shy glance, and the graceful uplifting of her head which the Earl admired so much. When he went up to her now and kissed her forehead, she turned aside blushing.

"Sing again, my darling," said Cranford. Her obliging acquiescence equalled his rapacity.

"I cannot wonder that you retain your love of music, Longleat, with such a bird in your nest," Mr. Ross said.

Helena gave him a bright glance, as she left her harp.

"Now, Glen, for one of the old impromptus."

Helena laughed at the expression; but ere long she was listening as she had never listened to music before. She no longer marvelled at her husband's extravagant testimony that "Ross could rule a world by his gift." There might be something in the occasion—something in the effect of this his first interview with her—something, perhaps, in the bitterness of feeling that his past hope had been destroyed by the Earl—something in the contrasted isolation of his life—from whatever cause, or combined causes—there was such a weird influence in the power and pathos of his music, that when it ended neither of the listeners spoke.

That was a happy morning. Cranford had long hoped for it. Glen banished thought, scruple, and resolve, and abandoned himself to the Elysium of the hour.

"You wished to ride, my darling," said Cranford, looking at the timepiece; "suppose we all take advantage of this lovely day, and go. What say you, old fellow?"

"Anything," answered Glen. "I am at your service for the day, if you like."

His cold gravity had all gone; and during their early luncheon, his conversation sparkled with choice anecdotes and witty sallies, so that Helena looked at him in wonder. Could this be the grave, haughty stoic, whom, but an hour ago, she had been inclined to dislike! Cranford took up a long vine-spray, with pale-green tendrils, and wreathed it in her hair. Glen, rising instantly, improvised some graceful lines to her, as the Goddess Hebe. She responded in a similar vein, and so they passed the hour merrily—sportive as children, and as unconscious, or as careless of sorrow in the world.

"Let us leave London," said the Countess, as they rode through the Eglinton gates; "I am tired of the Row, and the parks. How I pant for dear old Longleat."

"You are fond of the country, Lady Cranford?"

"I am. Every taste I have has a rural tint."

They went by a route familiar to Mr. Ross, and soon came to lanes that were very pretty. The season, even in the south, had been a late one. May had neared its end before snow had gone; then came bitter east winds, which had kept vegetation back; now the advantage was gained, for though it was June, the hedges had but just burst into life, and instead of dusty foliage everywhere, a refreshing green met the eye. Here they rode quietly conversing, with exploring intent.

"This is Richmond!" Helena exclaimed, as they emerged from a bye-lane on to the banks of the Thames.

"It is, Lady Cranford; being elected your guide, I chose the most charming scene I could. May I suggest that if your horse does not feel the curb on this springy turf, we shall come to grief, I fear."

She drew up the bridle; but, presently, Mr. Ross himself caught it quickly as she had turned round to look at the view. She did not know how much her thoughtless bravery interfered with his pleasure. The sun shone bril-

liantly; the air was exquisitely soft and balmy; the Thames was unrolled like a silver band between the emerald banks; the sky was all blue, and the stillness was only broken by the occasional lowing of the cattle in the meadows. The sounds came with the sweetness of a pastoral hymn.

They stopped under a fine old elm, whose bough-tracery could be distinctly seen against the sky; but sunshine laid its golden touch on the pale leaves, and the white buddings, that told how busy life was in the heart of the old tree. With Richmond Hill on the one hand, the valley with its classic associations on the other, what more could mortals want?

"I am sure I smell violets, Cranford," Helena said. Before he could answer she had dismounted.

Mr. Ross stared at him; the Earl shook his head—"I cannot teach her fear."

"It would be a pity if you should, Longleat; but caution is so different—she is reckless."

"Fear and caution are synonyms with her, Glen." He beckoned to the grooms, who received orders to bring the horses in an hour. They followed Helena to a bank, where she was searching the grass tufts. Presently, she was trying to gather the root of some of the sweet-scented things, when her hand was gently stayed. Mr. Ross cut the bunch from the sod, and added it to a cluster which he had placed in a large leaf. He tied it neatly together with grass, and gave it to the Countess.

"How did you find them?" she asked.

"By their fragrance, fair Lady. I never smell violets that I do not think of a French lady, who told me that their perfume on a spring day was to her like a hymn sounding from a wood in the stillness—a very fanciful, but an appropriate metaphor."

"Let us rest," said the Earl, seating himself upon a

felled tree. "I must thank you, my darling, for the suggestion of this ride; and you, Ross, for the thought of Richmond. It is lovely."

Glen threw himself upon the grass. The river flowed past them with a gentle murmur; the blue smoke rose from houses scattered among the distant trees. There were no shadows; it was all pale glory—the glory of resurrection after winter's death.

They scarcely felt inclined to talk. The Countess took off her hat—she was warm with riding, and the sunbeams fell through the lacing branches upon her head. She was holding the violets to her face: Cranford told her he could not distinguish the flowers from her eyes—in color they were so exactly the same, and he appealed to Mr. Ross if it were not so.

Glen looked up. She looked down over the flowers—their eyes met. What a difference in the two expressions! His were filled with the thoughtful melancholy of a man, who, long ago, launched on the tide of life, has battled with its dangers, passed through its perils—hers were dancing with the glee of a little child, who sits on the brink, and dabbles its feet in the stream that has to bear it on to the great ocean of eternity! Was it because he was so conscious of the difference that he sighed and looked away from her again?

"I think I shall take a villa over yonder," he said, after a long silence. "Twickenham has some retreats that would suit me well."

"Why should you want a 'retreat,' Mr. Ross?" Helena inquired, toying with her flowers. "I should not like you to have cloister fancies now, when I have only just known you. Should you, Cranford?"

"Would you not? Thank you."

He spoke in a low voice, with such feeling, that Helena said, "Are you melancholy, Mr. Ross?"

He and the Earl so laughed at the question that she blushed; and when Helena blushed, she *was* a Hebe.

"No, my Lady, I am not of 'a melancholy turn,' as they say north; but sometimes, I confess, I get tired of life, of its hollowness, its strife, and cares. I feel as if every charm were a weariness, or, as the Bible so expressively says—'a vain show.' In such hours, nothing seems to go right—life's bells all ring backwards; though I have no doubt that is because my own heart is out of tune. Then I only care for a quiet retreat."

"Then, don't you think, Mr. Ross"—here there was the shy hesitation which Cranford knew so well, and thought too pretty to be aided—"pardon me for saying it, but don't you think, when you feel so, that the stimulant of action would be the best cure? You remember what Bacon says: 'In this theatre of man's life, God and angels ought to be the only lookers-on.'"

Mr. Ross looked at her in surprise. "May I place by the side of that the words of one who was the spirit of yonder shades? 'Solitude, as most conducing to make us look into ourselves, is surely the most instructive state of life.'"

She shook her head. "You don't believe that, Mr. Ross."

"Do I not, Lady Cranford? Why not?"

"Because God has so gifted you, that the responsibility of influence rests heavily upon you."

Her eyes were dilating now—a true sign that Helena's timidity was vanishing before thought and interest. "Do you know," she went on, "that you remind me of this river, that comes from hills that are bleak, and banks that are bare, into this valley, that lies open to the glorious sun. It has passed through shady woods, perhaps through tangled brakes and lonely glens, yet it darts into the very heart of London, and becomes the highway

of commerce, the connecting-link between another hemisphere and ours. The little stream that hides in the wood, and spends its last strength in some pool in the dell, does not do that, Mr. Ross." She looked upon him with a gaze that was very earnest, very expressive of woman's intense consciousness of responsibility.

"But the stream also fertilizes," he said.

"It does; but only the scentless wild-flower or the fruitless tree. No, no, Mr. Ross; I see in your character much that reminds me of the majestic river; you were not formed for inactive obscurity. Don't try the experiment: it would wither you. When you were speaking, the other night, I felt all I say. I saw the effect of your eloquence, and, had you been my own brother, I could not have more earnestly hoped that you would follow the guidings of your star."

He sprang to his feet, as if he had suddenly felt the power of half-dead energy revive with vigor. "Thank you, my Lady," he said; "I should like to live so that the longest life would be to me a priceless gift—a succession of blessed days—and the most sudden death a welcome call. It is only to such an one that Waller's beautiful lines may be applied—

> 'The soul's dark cottage, battered and decay'd,
> Lets in new light through chinks that time has made.'"

The Earl, too, had risen, and leaned against the elm. Helena went to him, and rested her head upon his breast. He passed his arms round her, and, with his cheek upon her brow, said, fondly, "Little mentor! You must pardon her, old friend. She has to keep me in order, you know, and so has fallen into bad habits."

She laughed, that merry, silvery little laugh!

"Cranford! I was not rude. Was I, Mr. Ross?"

Rude! He looked at her as he might have done had

his guardian angel asked forgiveness for leading him in safe paths.

"Don't answer her, Glen; she is a naughty child, and must not be flattered."

What an infinitude of love there was in the face that bent over hers! The past shadows were all gone in the present sunshine. His cup of joy was running over.

"You will not return to the cloister fancies, Mr. Ross?" she said, archly.

"Never, so long as your Ladyship condescends to grace the gay world."

"By what sign shall I remind you of the compact?"

She looked up with a mischievous glance at her husband. His answer was a kiss.

"Well, what say you to our lady?" as Glen remained silent.

"Keep the violets," returned Mr. Ross, "they may not have withered before you have forgotten your command."

"Oh, that is too bad." She raised herself from the Earl's supporting arm. "Am I so fickle, Longleat?"

"Don't mind him, darling, he is a misanthrope in feeling, an atheist in love."

"What a character!" she said, running away over the grass. "There are the horses, and I am hungry."

They went to the "Star and Garter," had some refreshment, and arrived at Eglinton House by seven o'clock.

Mr. Ross was greeted with such a warm welcome by the Dowager, that Helena at once saw the estimation in which he was held. Indeed, the devoted attentions of the servants showed that he was regarded as one of the family. The night was a happy one; conversation never flagged. Both the wife and mother were interested in the college reminiscences of the two friends.

If Mr. Ross had his grave moods, he could be resplendently gay; if he were a misanthrope in feeling, he was self-denying for that of others; and if an atheist in love, he could veil his atheism most effectually by his belief in his friend's happiness, by his son-like deference to the mother, and his courtly attentions to the wife.

So thought Helena. After dinner they had music; then the Dowager dozed a little. They spoke in whispers, but now and then a little laugh was heard, sweet and low as distant bells. The fire burned cheerily, for the night was chill. They were as joyous as the excitement of this meeting could make them. It was not until Mr. Ross had left them that the shadow of melancholy returned to him; he felt as if he had gone from a festivity to come to a house of death, where the windows were darkened.

He shivered as he entered his stately, cold-looking mansion, and it was dawn before he slept.

"See, Cranford, I am putting the violets into a safe nook."

The Earl looked over Helena's shoulder.

"What have you written, my darling?" He read the lines on the paper in which the flowers were placed. "Not to be opened until Mr. Glen Ross, and the Countess of Longleat have left the world."

They both laughed, and Helena told the Dowager that this had been the happiest day of her life.

Long years after, those violets were found by a little child, and carried to the survivor of the three: and the child wondered at the burst of agony, the rain of tears which fell upon her upturned face, as he looked on the dead flowers that crumbled into dust—no more memorials of that sweet spring day.

CHAPTER XV.

PATIENT HEROISM.

First, I thought, almost despairing,
This must crush my spirit now;
Yet I bore it, and am bearing—
Only do not ask me how.
HEINE. *Translated by George Macdonald.*

MANCHESTER was looking up again. With spring better prospects had come. Most of the mills were working full time. Soup-kitchens and relief-committees were no longer the chief topics of conversation. The suburbs were not now visited by suspicious-looking, gaunt men; and street corners ceased to be the rendezvous of half-clad, pallid, angry declaimers. Differences between men and masters were settled. Anxiety gave place to hope in the hearts of those who had so suffered. The hive was filled again, and the bees were all content.

But churchyards held their victims of the past, whose names were unrecorded on their pauper graves. Prison calendars told of past crowded cells. Old officials said they had never known such times, for, after that quiet lull at first, the smouldering fire had been fanned by Chartism into flame, and lawless destruction ran riot, just for a short season.

When the panic was over, its effects were seen in those whose positions had demanded from them almost

superhuman efforts. Among the clergy there were few who suffered as Edward Seymour suffered, for there were few whose exertions had been so untiring. He had spent long days, long nights in forming plans for the alleviation of the distress; he had passed hour after hour beside the sick; had heard the last words of the dead; had carried hope to the despairing, consolation to the bereaved. In addition, he had opened his church two nights in the week, where his people heard addresses and lectures, which brightened the dulness of their lives, and helped to make them better citizens, more patient sufferers, happier men and women. He had disdained the dread of infectious fevers, had obeyed every call so far as strength permitted, and now, when better times had come, the Great-heart fell when no longer needed. For six Sabbaths a brother clergyman had occupied his pulpit; for six weeks, as Hudson said, "It was one body's work to tell folks how Master Edard was." Every inquiry was faithfully reported to him by his sister, who saw how much the sympathy of his people cheered him.

It was the morning of the day when our three friends went to Richmond. The late spring balm was over all England. Manchester looked bright and gay. Edward was lying upon a couch in his own room, so still that he appeared to be asleep. One wasted hand shaded his face, the other lay listless, in that languid position which is such a painful indication of weakness in a man. Margaret had just entered. She stood, with a glass of jelly in her hand, scarcely knowing whether to speak or not; but as she deliberated, Edward sighed so deeply, it was almost a groan.

"Edward!" she whispered, softly.

He removed his hand, and looked up.

"I did not know you were there, dear."

She knelt by his side, and offered to feed him. He

took one spoonful, then shook his head, and fixing his eyes upon her, said, with an expressive look, "Dear Maggie, I must alter a Bible verse to give you your tribute. 'Many *sisters* have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.'" This was the second time that that verse had been given to her.

She would not trust her voice to answer. The doctor had said that Edward must be kept quite free from agitation. Her feeling could wait. So with an almost breaking heart, she asked cheerfully, "How long he was going to be an idler?"

"Until I go *home*, my sister."

One look of anguish, one quick contraction of the brows, one glance of almost wild terror, and Margaret was calm again.

"Then we ought to go home very soon, for mamma is so very anxious now that Clara's accident keeps her there. Poor Clara! she is as unlucky as ever," she went on playfully, "is she not? A broken arm is rather worse than even a sprained ancle. Papa says the gamekeeper's cottage is put into thorough repair now, and that the sooner Dick and Mary go the better. Dear old Bronwylfa! I seem to hear the sound of the waves below the cliffs; now that we are really going, I long to be there. Dr. Franks says that the briny air is just what you want. Clara and I will have to turn sailors, and bring out the 'Sylph,' for a trial trip before Charley comes back. Bonnie Prince Charley, our ain sailor laddie! What a happy family we shall be, all gathered together again, when our bronzed middy comes back!"

There was a glitter in those soft brown eyes, and a nervous tremor of the sweet mouth, as she chatted so volubly and gaily. She would not appear to have understood Edward's reference to "home;" but all the time, much as she could do to avoid bursting into tears.

At the name of Charley, he turned his face from her, and gave a quick sob, as quickly checked for her sake. When his hand touched hers again, she felt that it was wet with tears shed silently. She bit her lips, and went away for a few moments. Anything but to see Edward weep, she *could* bear. She carried a glass of wine to him, but before he could take it Hudson appeared with a tray, on which there was something that had a delicious appetising smell.

"Yon's old Mester Allen, Miss Marget," she said in her curt way.

Margaret looked at Edward, who said, "Let him come upstairs, Hudson."

"No, Mr. Edard, not till that there soup's gone down, not if I lose my place for't. You've taken next to nothin' for many a day, an' I ne'er know'd a body as could live on egg-shells yet."

Hudson looked as unflinching as one of the "old guard;" she spoke with the respectful freedom which old servants so often use.

"Miss Marget," she said, "I won't say what 'ull happen if Mr. Edard don't eat. As sure as ever my name's Hudson, my Lady 'ull blame me as have bin in her service thirty 'ear come Shrovetide. It's all along them poor folk, to say nothin' o' them theer Methodises, as comes teasin', an' mitherin', an' talkin' when any one as is sick should be doin' naught but sleep and eat. I'd like to know how babies 'ud be reared if they didn't live in that fashion, an' a body as is comin' out o' fever is naught stronger."

Margaret, secretly inclined to Hudson's opinion. It was indeed a fact that the invalid was making no progress, although the fever had left him; and she fancied that he would be none the worse for a little wholesome advice, however homely might be the words in which it was given.

"But we are going to do better, Hudson," she said

cheerfully; "Mr. Edward is going home, and Wales is to work wonders, Dr. Franks says."

"Well, thank God for that, Miss Marget," said Hudson, decidedly. "I'm sure *I'm* fair tired o' this smoky place, with never a bit o' bleaching ground, nor a flower to smell at. Do you think now as the daffodillies 'ull be over?" she asked in such a tone of sudden interest that Margaret laughed heartily, and even Edward smiled.

"Indeed, I don't know Hudson; ugly yellow things!"

"Eh, but I like th' sight on 'em, Miss Marget; but you ne'er did like aught yaller—I remember that when you were a child—except primroses; how sweet yon' old orchard 'ull be with them, and violets!"

It was like a spring day to hear the old body talk. Edward caught her spirit, and tried to raise himself. In an instant, with the tenderest care, Hudson, the plain-spoken, but the gentle nurse, had him lifted, and his pillows made comfortable. Then, after a moment's anxious watching, to see how the soup "went down," she left the room satisfied.

Margaret sat on a footstool beside Edward, and looked at him with a radiant face.

"Edward," she said, "isn't it refreshing to hear her talk of home?"

"It is, Maggie darling. I shall be glad to go, if it be possible."

"No ifs, your Reverence. It *must* be. How lovely, indeed, the orchard will seem, and the lime walk, and, above all, the path over the cliffs that leads to the fishers' cottages, and St. Marie's! Sometimes when I have gone there in the evenings, just when the 'sea-pinks' and the sand-broom were in flower, I have scarcely known which was the more beautiful, the sky above, or the earth below, there was such splendor of color in both. And then the sea—the dear grand old sea—dashing its

waves against the rocks, and sparkling in the shine, as if all the stars in heaven had been flung down, and lay there broken. Do you know, I always enjoyed evening prayers more after a lonely walk there on such a night. And it made me so glad to hear the fishermen's children shouting and laughing on the shore, with their mothers sitting there, waiting for their husband's boats after they had been out for several nights."

"Ah," said Edward, in a firmer voice than he had spoken since his illness began, "I, too, like that sight. I remember one night, perhaps you remember it too, Maggie, we had had some foul weather, and the boats were all out—not one left in the bay—and there had been some 'weeping and wringing of hands,' as Kingsley says; and then came that lovely day, and still lovelier night. We had a friend dining with us; and I think you and he were in one of the greenhouses."

Margaret was leaning her chin upon her hand, looking up with eager interest. Perhaps, if Edward had been looking at her, he would have stopped, for a death-like pallor came over her face, her fingers tightened until the nails left indents in the palm; and then her mouth settled into sternness. She did not answer him.

"I went to the shore, for I was anxious about the poor fellows; and when I got to the top of the cliff, I could not but stand still, it was such a grand sight. The sea was heaving with a long swell; it was only now and then that a big wave broke against the rock; the waters seemed to be shuddering, and then sighing, if you can understand me—it was not a merrie joyous dance of waves—and the sunset was not an ordinary one. Oh, it was grand! The colors didn't blend into faint hues, as they generally do; they were distinct masses of gold and violet and scarlet, from which plunged rays like drawn swords—yellow flames—into a great chasm of ether. The sky might have opened, for I looked

over, and beyond the sun himself into what seemed a furnace of flaming fire. I shall never forget that sky; it gave me more clear conceptions of heaven's glory, and of hell's terrors, than any I had had before. I absolutely trembled with awe, and I bared my head instinctively, for I felt that I was in God's presence. When I looked down on the shore, I saw there a number of the fishers' wives on the sands; some had their babies, and some their knitting: a few were looking over the waters, but none of them seemed to heed the sunset. One figure, however, attracted my notice. She was standing on the rock alone, with one hand resting on her hip, the other shading her eyes—so! One of the women called to her; but she kept still, looking at the sun until it went lower and lower, and dipped down. I thought, perhaps, she would move then, but still she stood motionless, until suddenly she clapped her hands and shouted; and all the women went to her, and there was such a clamor of voices, for the first mast was just peeping over the bar; then followed another, and another. The little fleet was soon in sight, and the women counted them, with oh, such anxiety: but all were safe; and some cried, and some talked, and others laughed. I never saw such joy, Maggie. I walked down to them; and then I knew the solitary figure was young Jones's bride. I went to her: she answered when I spoke; but I saw how much she wished to be alone for her heart was full. So I strolled away, and then I met a number of the fishermen's children. They had made those shell-strings, that we made when we were children, Maggie; and some had them round their little heads, some round their necks, and they had harnessed themselves with mermaids' ribbons. They were a thoughtless band, until I said, 'Little ones, the boats are over the bar.' And then, with a glad whoop, they all ran to their mothers. I saw such a meeting when the boats

were moored, that since I have been lying here, so weak, I have thought that, perhaps, it was the type of another and a grander one—of another haven more peaceful than Bronwylfa's—of another home where God himself shall welcome me to rest."

Edward closed his eyes, there was a sweet smile on his face. Margaret's was hidden upon her arm. Not a tear fell from her eye; her heart was too full for that. Remember that night! Ah, did she not? When she had stood beside the Earl for the first time, and looked with him at that sky, and heard him say, "It was over for ever!" But *his* "beautiful hope" had been given to him again in a happier reality; and *her* life was—what? And now Edward talked of going home, talked of leaving her, and with calm tranquillity! Her pain was deadened almost to stupor; she dared not turn to him as she got up from her low seat. She well knew how colorless her face would be; how heavy her eyes; for she had started from her own shadow in the mirror more than once lately. So she simply answered,

"Are you not talking too much, Edward? You will scarcely be fit to see Mr. Allen;" but he wished it so much that she sent for him to come upstairs.

Mr. Allen's eyes glistened when he saw the ravages which sickness had made in the late stalwart young man. The change shocked him perceptibly. Edward saw it.

"Do I look as if I were going home, Mr. Allen?" he asked, as he grasped his hand. "Well, I am not afraid. It is only a step from earth to heaven."

"God be praised!" said the old man, fervently. "His hand has been heavy, sir; but it's been the touch of love."

"Yes, all love—all love, Mr. Allen. Tell me about them."

There was no need to say who "them" meant; this

visitor knew how near to their pastor's heart his people in Angel Meadow lay; and during Edward's illness he had visited them so constantly, that one of them said, quaintly, "Methody Tom had getten a new place, sure-ly, an' 'ad left th' Methodies to be t' parson's clerk. An a' reet good un he made! He did na know which wur th' best mon; fur th' amen wur as gradely a pray-er as th' parson, an' they both on 'em did 'bout book."

"Are you quite able to hear, sir?"

"As able as I think I shall ever be, Mr. Allen. The day is far spent."

There was not the least tinge of sadness in his look or tone. It was simply the peaceful joy of one whose long day's work was over, and who waited for his Master's call. It was inexpressibly painful to his sister, and very touching to the old veteran. There was just an instant's silence. Then Mr. Allen burst forth—

"Glory, eternal glory, sir! But, please God, the crown isn't ready for you yet. Shall I pray, sir?"

Before Edward could answer, he was down upon his knees, pouring out his heart in impassioned prayer. He seemed to wrestle with God for that precious life, and ministering angels bore the petition to the throne. Compassion for the flock in Angel Meadow added feeling to his entreaty, and love that was mingled with veneration gave powerful force to his language.

Margaret could not control her sobs. She had never so realized why "the fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." A singular assurance of Edward's recovery was given to her by the forceful impression upon her mind of the old promise, "While you are yet calling, I will answer." She rose from her knees comforted.

Edward took Mr. Allen's hand in his. They two—the aged pilgrim and the youthful soldier of Christ—exchanged

such a gaze as they might have done within Heaven's gate when safe for evermore.

During the past six weeks there had been nine deaths, all of them in hope but one—that was the woman who so shamefully robbed poor William in his last days. It seemed, indeed, that retribution had come. Mr. Allen found her dying and forsaken; for, what is very rare among the poor in Lancashire, there was not one among her neighbours who had done her "a friendly turn." When he went the third time, she was dead, and the workhouse nurse sat beside her drunk.

Jem Brierly had had the fever, and was recovered. All through his delirium he had raved about Mr. Seymour.

"Indeed," said Mr. Allen, "I believe it was fretting about you, sir, that brought it on."

Lad-like, he had "pulled through," and now was eating his mother "out of house and home."

Edward smiled at Jem's name. He told Mr. Allen they were taking him to Bronwylfa, as assistant to Dick Burns.

There was no hope of Mrs. Latham's rheumatism being cured sufficiently for her to walk again; but "She is very happy and content," said Mr. Allen. "The nobleman her son lives with has settled a tidy little sum on her. He is a good man."

Edward fancied that Margaret shivered—she was sitting on the hassock with her head on his breast. Shiverings were not to be disregarded in these fever-days; but she told him she was "all right," and smiled so cheerfully that he was satisfied. Her smile faded when he laid his head again upon the pillow.

One piece of news interested them especially. Mr. Greaves had sent word to Edward that the time of his son's punishment had been shortened by the Home Secretary, in consideration of his good conduct, and he

had got leave to come home; but he had had a kind offer made to him, by one who knew his history, which was an inducement to stay away until he had redeemed his character and fortunes; so he was going to America, and Mr. Greaves had written a kind letter to him, addressed to New York. He would be going into the interior with the gentleman who had befriended him shortly after the letter arrived.

"The hearts of Dick Burns and Mary were almost breaking with gratitude," said Mr. Allen. "The very thought of seeing green fields again seems too much for her; and if you never do another good thing, Miss Seymour, so long as you live, you will have a blessing for the work you have done in Angel Meadow. I believe Dick Burns will be a good servant, and repay you for all."

Yes, Mr. Allen was right. He did repay Margaret for all.

"And now, sir, I have a letter for you, sent by Mr. Greaves' son. His father wished you to see it, for, he said, maybe, as you were lying ill, you'd be trying to count your sheaves; and he thinks you will bring in this one from another land, sir. Your letters have touched his heart."

If ever Faith, with triumphant gaze, looked right into the mysteries of the holy world—right through the vista of Time into glories beyond, she did then. Thomas Allen's words put new life into Edward. Oh! what mattered his conflicts, when the prize was almost in his grasp! Let it be given now, or let it be held in view for a few more fleeting years—what matter? He should go home with rejoicing.

"Tell them all, Mr. Allen, that, please God, I shall see them again in this world," said Edward; "that I have been cast down, but not forsaken; that I believe I have

more work to do; but, if not—if not—keep near them, old friend, for my sake, and tell them I shall look for every one—every one!"

He spoke faintly. Margaret looked anxiously at Mr. Allen, who rose, and answered,

"Sir, you will remember the words of the Book—'The youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall fall: but they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.' Keep fast hold of that, Mr. Seymour, and there will be light in the deepest valley—the covert of a great rock in every storm."

He laid the wasted hand gently down, and went his way. As he passed along the streets, many turned to look at the fine old man, whose lips were moving in audible prayer.

The end of June had come. A lovely warm day was nearing to evening. There had been a magnificent tide; the wet sands were still shining in the sun; sea-gulls were flying low, dipping their breasts in the waves that had only receded a pace. The cliffs were blushing with sea-pinks, and there was not a cloud in the sky. Truly it was a peaceful ending to a radiant day. Roses were peeping in at Margaret's lattice. Mrs. Seymour had just gone into the room to see that everything was nice. She looked at the sea with a wistful yearning. Her heart was aching for the one who would be the only missing-link in the home-chain to-night—Charley, the long-absent sailor-lad!

Clara, now quite recovered, sat with her father, who had been an invalid for some time through a fall from his horse.

She sadly fidgeted him, for he was a little nervous.

"Child," he said at last, "can't you do something? Do, for goodness' sake, put on your hat and run out. You are never still a minute. What ails you?"

"Papa," she faltered, "I do so wish Charley were coming too. I want Charley."

Now in truth Charley had been in the thoughts of each of the three, all through the day. The last time Bronwylfa had had Edward and Margaret, it had had Charley also.

He drew Clara to him, kissed her, and said with tears in his eyes, "God bless you, my girl. Don't let your mother hear you. We must welcome those who are coming. Another day our young admiral will have an ovation to himself."

Clara smiled then and ran down the avenue, thinking of his words—"Our young admiral." They so cheered her spirits, that when the carriage turned the bend suddenly, she hailed it with a joyful shout. In two minutes she was in her sister's arms; their greeting was a mixture of smiles and tears.

Mr. and Mrs. Seymour were greatly shocked by Edward's appearance; but their worst apprehensions were for Margaret, for without any apparent illness, she was fragile and wasted, though more beautiful than ever. Her father thought as he folded her to his heart, that had Lord Cranford seen her now he would not, as he had once done, have compared her to a rich and radiant gem; and to his eyes she was more than ever rightly named—Bronwylfa's pearl.

That same night Mary Burns was settled in her new home. She had travelled by the same train as Margaret and Edward. Richard was to follow on Saturday. All the articles of their scanty furniture they wished to keep, had arrived two or three days ago; but as Miss Seymour well knew they would not fill the lodge, her own benevolence had supplied the rest. When Mary entered, her surprise and gratitude made her speechless.

Later in the evening Margaret and Clara went to see her.

The tide was on the turn, its surge broke with clear

distinctness on the shore. Clara did not heed the sound—it had not been a lost blessing to her. And when her sister remarked on the beautifully clear sky, she looked up in surprise, saying, that it was "as usual."

Margaret's thoughts instantly took wing to those whom she had left in Manchester—the poor in their crowded alleys, who perhaps had never in their lives seen heaven's stainless blue. And oh, how saddened she felt for them. The gamekeeper's lodge was just on the edge of Lord Ruthven's wood—by the large gates of Bronwylfa Park. Its gables were covered with ivy, its walls with jasmine and monthly roses.

The window of the "house place" shone brightly through the leaves; a cheerful fire cast a red-glow upon the path and beds of flowers.

Miss Seymour looked in at the window. Mary was in an oak chair before the fire. Her old cat, transported from Manchester, was coiled at her feet. That "interior" was a pretty little picture.

"Well, Mary," said Miss Seymour, "you are settled in your new home."

Mary rose and tried to speak, but instead, she burst into tears, and holding her apron to her eyes with her other hand grasping the young lady's, she sobbed aloud.

Miss Seymour remained silent. She knew what a relief weeping was; who indeed knew better?

Clara looked embarrassed, but seeing the cat, and then a bowl of milk upon the table, she characteristically tried to make friends with pussy by a bountiful supply.

"I've bin thinkin' o' them I've left, Miss Saymour," said Mary at last, "an' wishin' as all i' Angel Meadow had my luck, an' then I geet agate o' thinkin' o' th' little 'un."

Here, the mother's sorrow that had day by day for years, thrown stones on the dead child's cairn, found vent in words.

"She is safe," said Margaret, gently. "Don't you know the promise, Mary? 'Them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.'"

The tears were stayed, then the sobs were hushed. Clara, who had never seen her sister as she was now, paused in her caressing of pussy and listened.

"I know," said Margaret, "that it is natural you should think of her in your happiness; but had she lived in the place you have left, she would not have died sinless. You might have sighed that ever she was born. Instead, she is a spotless angel, waiting for her mother. Look at yonder star shining over the sea. Mary, it does not more surely hine than Christ's promise is true—'I am the Resurrection and the Life.' You will find your little one again."

Mary smiled through her tears. "Eh, but I'm rare an' thankful, Miss Saymour, as e'er yo' coom to Manchester. An' to think as my Dick 'ull foind a house like a paliss, an' him bin on th' strike iver so lung. I canna thank yo'. My heart's gradely full; it is for sure. An' I've heered sin' I coom, Miss, as yo' ranged o' my new things. I ax your pardon, but I'm raight thankful."

Clara, to whom this address was made with many curtseys, was so unaccustomed to the broad Lancashire dialect and homely manners, that she felt a little confused; but half for her sister's sake and more than half from her own kindness of heart, she held out her hand and said with characteristic frankness,

"I am very glad you have come to the lodge, Mrs. Burns. I have a brother Charley—he will be at home soon; and will be glad to see you too because"—she had got so far in her speech very well. Then she stopped and glanced at her sister, who looked fondly at the bright young face that had never known a cloud until "Charley" went away—the loving look encouraged her—"because Edward and Margaret brought you here," she said.

Mary dropped another curtsey, and as they went through the porch she gathered a rose, and begged that Miss Seymour would take it to the "parson" from her.

As the two sisters walked back to the house, Margaret reflected on the singular ways by which mortals are led to happiness. "It may be," she thought, "that the evening of my life will be more serene for the morning's trial."

But who among them who loved her could have guessed what the trial had been? She knelt beside her mother at prayers, and heaved not the faintest sigh when Edward thanked God that *all* had been *well* since last they worshipped together. She fondly kissed her father in return for his good-night blessing, and laughed merrily when he told her that "Bronwylfa's brightness had come back with its pearl." But when she entered her own old room, she put out her lamp and knelt a long, long time before the window, "only thinking," as maidens say.

She remembered once having wondered if all her life would be as peaceful as one hour. Now, she wondered if it would be all one long battle with her heart—if every hour would be as hopeless as this later one. With morning light came morning joy, and, being at Bronwylfa again put new life into her. A few days afterwards the mild weather changed; high winds prevailed, which, if boisterous, were very bracing. Margaret delighted in struggling with them on the shore. One morning she entered a room where Mr. and Mrs. Seymour were.

"My dear girl, where have you been?" her father asked.

"Over the cliffs, papa. You never did see such waves; the wind is rising, and the tide is rolling in grandly. There are hundreds of white horses dashing over the 'Shoe-Bank.'"

"I say, mamma, just look at this girl! Where have our plagues got their sea-notions from? Clara sailor-born; Charley an embryo admiral; and Margaret here, who

hasn't had a bit of color in her cheek for months, is as red as a cabbage-rose, because the tide is fine."

Both the ladies laughed.

"Ah, papa, you don't know all. See, mamma." She held up a letter.

"Oh! Margaret dear."

"Oh, mother dear!" she echoed her words and mimicked her tone, then kissed her, and gave her Charley's letter. "One of my presentiments, Mr. Seymour, made me meet the postman. I felt so sure there would be something."

Mrs. Seymour's hands trembled so that she could scarcely even hold the letter.

"Stay, my dear," said her methodical husband. He took the letter and cut round the seal carefully.

Charley's epistle was addressed to his parents; but the lines were more frequently written for his mother's eye. He was coming home for a few weeks. Indeed, he said he should arrive almost as soon as the letter. "And tell Clara to have the 'Sylph' ready, mamma; and how is Neptune?" (his dog) "and is old Captain Ball all tight and trim? and how are the bipeds, Margaret and Edward?"

They laughed heartily at the epistle. It was such a mixture of laddish ramblings, and of real, earnest feeling. "So like Charley!" his sister said. The postscript was an especial message of love to the "dear Earl." Unconsciously or not, Mrs. Seymour glanced at Margaret, who walked away to the window.

Her mother's heart ached. She had long ago guessed her secret, for a mother's perceptions are very keen; but, neither by word nor look, would she ever imply that she had done so.

"How long has the lad been away?" asked Mr. Seymour.

"More than two years," his mother said; her heart had kept a reckoning of every day.

"Margaret, are you inclined for another run?"

"Yes, papa."

"Then come along." He led the way to the same place where she stood with the Earl that night. She never went there now; but her father happened to stop at the end of the limes, just where the Earl had stood.

And, by a strange coincidence, she stood there another night, when all was wild terror and confusion!

Her thoughts had gone back to that past evening with the Earl. "Lord Cranford said he had never seen a storm on this coast. I wonder what he would say to this sea!" said Mr. Seymour. "White horses" were indeed leaping over the "Shoe-Bank," plunging furiously against "Black Rock." The wind had risen very quickly during the last hour.

"Will there be a storm to-night, papa?"

"I fear so. I hope our lad is not on the coast."

"Oh, papa!"

"Look at those gulls! They seem just delighted with the roar. Don't show any fear before your mother, child; if possible, we must keep her in the front rooms, where she won't hear the wind much."

"Papa, she will be in Charley's room now, I know, as anxious as possible to have everything ready, and that looks over the sea."

"Humph!" said her father, "if things can go contrary they will."

"The boom of the distant waves was like artillery on a battle-field. The wind was "blowing great guns." They stood there a while longer, then, seeing old Ball (the captain of the Earl's life-boat) standing on the cliff with his glass, they went to him. He touched his "sou'-wester."

"Well, captain," said Mr. Seymour, "will it be a foul night?"

He swept the horizon before he answered.

"She is all ready for launching, sir." It was a suggestive remark.

"Shall you need her, do you think?"

"Can't say, sir. Have you any news of the young captain, sir?"

He always spoke of Charley as the young captain.

Margaret eagerly told him the news. He was gifted with caution—he would not give an opinion when she asked if he thought her brother's ship would be on the coast.

"There will be an experienced sailor at the helm in weather like this, Miss Seymour," he said, and nothing more.

They went home, and found Mrs. Seymour calm and smiling. Thoughts of Charley's danger never entered her head. She was too full of joy that he was coming home. Days passed on. The coast was strewn with wrecks, for the storm begun that day had continued with few intervals of lull. If the wind did go down for a while, before night it would rise again, and so a weary, anxious week came to an end.

No tidings of Charley's ship arrived until the following Thursday. On that morning, in the grey dawn, cannon at the fort announced the arrival of the "Aurora" in the Mersey. Ere night fell, Charley was folded to his mother's heart.

* * * * * *

CHAPTER XVI.

DELIVER US FROM EVIL.

It is not that I love you less
  Than when before your feet I lay,
But to prevent the sad increase
  Of hopeless love, I keep away.

In vain, alas! for ev'ry thing
  Which I have known belong to you,
Your form does to my fancy bring,
  And makes my old wounds bleed anew.

WALLER.

Two years have passed since the date of our last chapter, bringing such events and changes as are common to our mutable world.

It is the last day in August, seemingly the harbinger of a glorious autumn, for Edward, who sits in his study in Edgware Street, has to draw the venetians closer, the golden sunshine streams so fully on the table—quite as fully, though not from so clear a sky, as it does on a certain lawn that slopes down to Grasmere Lake in Westmoreland. Two gentlemen are seated on a garden-chair that stands near the water's edge. You will easily recognize them. One is evidently of luxurious habit; for he has stretched his legs on more than his own share of the seat and has just lighted a cigar, although his companion tells him that "Smokers have no business to poison the morning atmosphere."

"Have a weed, Ross," is the answer, with one between his teeth, whilst hunting in his pocket for another match. "I assure you it is pleasant and soothing."

"Not I, Longleat! Why in the world does a fellow want 'soothing' in a paradise like this?"

"Why, indeed, Mr. Ross? Cranford, you are incorrigible."

Both the gentlemen started, for they had heard no footfall. The Earl laughed, and, holding out his hand, tried to draw the young lady nearer to him; but she drew back.

"You shall not give my flowers another odor," she said, looking down into the basket she held. "I assure you, Cranford, when I went into your library to re-arrange those there, they had all one scent—tobacco!"

"Had they, my Lady Countess?"—throwing his cigar into the lake and lighting a better one. "Then that must be the reason why I have been such a dunce at learning their names. You have frequently told me their different scents might teach me. It is always consolatory to find a reason for one's own stupidity."

Helena, for of course it was Helena, shook her head, and, taking the cigar from his lips, held the fresh blossoms to his face, and asked him to give the names of some. He looked at them with a comical expression.

"They are very beautiful, Helena."

"Of course they are; but I did not ask you to tell me that."

Cranford took off his straw hat, and ran his fingers through his glossy brown locks.

"Is that to let daylight in, Longleat," she asked so wickedly, that he laughed heartily.

She was a pretty sight—as pretty as any you would find in those galleries of art where the dreams of the masters are enshrined. Her white morning gown was

tucked up to escape the dew, and showed her dainty little feet. Her curls, golden and luxuriant as they were two years ago, fell from beneath her broad-brimmed hat, that cast a deeper shadow over her magnificent dark eyes and peachy cheeks. A large basket of flowers was between her finely-moulded arms. The two who did see her pronounced her "perfect" in their secret thoughts.

"I am waiting, Longleat," she said, in the old wilful way.

"Well, this is a poppy," touching a brilliant scarlet geranium.

"Cranford!"

"Helena! it is just like those flowers in yonder field."

"It is nothing of the kind," she said; "never say you are not stupid again. How often have I told you? Mr. Ross, is it not too bad?"

The question was shily put, and she did not look at him.

He had been watching this little scene; his elbow rested on the garden-chair, his hand shaded his face, and he appeared too grave for play. He replied instantly, in a very gentle voice, as if he were addressing some one whom he worshipped. "It does seem 'too bad,' Lady Cranford; but Longleat never cared to learn the names of flowers."

"Excepting that of this one," said the Earl, "the fairest of them all. Eh, old friend?"

Mr. Ross merely bowed.

Helena blushed, and, poising the basket on her head as gracefully as one of Egypt's daughters, she went away. They watched her in silence until she had passed through the low porch of the pretty rustic home.

Mr. Ross did not seem to be in good spirits, for he sighed deeply as he too moved away.

"What ails you, Glen?" asked Cranford, flirting his

cigar-ash off. "You seem out of sorts. Are you tired with your journey from London last night?"

Mr. Ross smiled, and, kicking a loose pebble before him, said, with an attempt at gaiety,

"Not exactly, Longleat. You know I used to be subject to the blues. The disease has not left me."

"Blues, my dear fellow! nonsense," answered the Earl, kindly. "A man with the House at his feet when he chooses to speak, a colossal fortune, and no end of friends, to talk of 'blues!'"

A bitter smile stole round his companion's lips.

"Friends! Yes, I suppose I have them; but you did well to put fame and fortune first."

His tone was mocking and sarcastic.

"Why, what the deuce ails you, Ross?" asked Cranford, in genuine surprise.

"Nothing, Longleat, nothing; don't mind me." Mr. Ross looked into his friend's face frankly. "It is only the old tale—a lonely life and a sad one."

Lord Cranford threw his cigar into the lake, and, passing his arm through Glen's, said, vexedly, "I wonder why in heaven's name you don't marry."

Why, indeed!

Those words were on the lips of his hearer; but he checked himself. There was a long silence.

"This is a lovely land, Longleat," Mr. Ross said, in an altered voice, at last. "I fancy morning is its best time. After London, it seems a paradise."

"It *is* a paradise, Glen. And I vote for a mountain ramble. It will blow all your 'blues' away. Helena delights in such a thing. We will fetch her."

If he had happened to look at his companion he would have seen the sudden flush that suffused his face, the quick contraction of his brows, at the mention of her name.

"Helena," Cranford called, when they entered the hall, with its long low latticed window on one side and its flower-filled stove on the other—"Helena."

Her voice came back as sweetly as it did that morning at Calton long ago, when her father called to her. You remember it, do you not? and how the two housemaids pronounced her "a picter." She was quite as deserving of the eulogium now as then.

At the sound of her step, Mr. Ross turned into the porch again. He laid his hand upon his heart, like one in pain.

"We are going for a ramble," said the Earl. "Glen has brought some town fancies that want blowing away. I will be with you in a moment."

He sprang lightly up the narrow stairs, singing as he went. She was left in the hall, drawing on her gloves. Her manner for a moment was a little irresolute; then she went up to him.

"Are you not well, Mr. Ross?"

Oh, why did she come to his side at that moment, when, before all angels, he was trying to conquer a love that was unholy, trying to battle with a fate which, if cruel, was yet untainted by remorse! Why? Who can tell? It was one of those moments on which a destiny hangs.

"Can I do anything for you?"

Her voice thrilled him. He trembled, and remained silent.

She was surprised, and looked up into his face. Then suddenly and clearly the truth was revealed to her. A rush of past incidents, of memories, came sweeping over her, and, alas! a full knowledge of her own heart was given also.

It is strange how, in moments of such intense excitement, a scene may be photographed on the brain.

Helena distinctly heard the limpid splashing of the lake, as its tiny waves curled on the brink; she noticed how stately and solemn the mountains seemed; how perfect the semblance of the lion and the lamb; and what a golden haze rested on the brow of Loughrigg. She noticed all these, though every pulse seemed to have ceased its beating.

She tried to repeat her inquiry, but her lips were sealed.

He turned to her slowly, as if he feared to trust himself.

Their eyes met. Then he seized the cold little hand that she had unconsciously rested upon his arm.

"My own darling! God help me!"

"Glen! oh, Glen!"

There was such uncontrollable agony in her voice that he was startled. She clung to him like a frightened child; her tearless, shuddering sobs were pitiful. He recoiled from the gulf which his own words had opened.

"Hush, my darling!" he whispered, soothingly; "hush, dear!" For one brief instant he held her to his heart, his lips rested on her brow. He looked down into her dilated eyes brilliant with excitement, at the parted lips scarlet with youth, but parched with emotion. She might have been a frail bird that had found shelter in his bosom, which he feared to clasp whilst his soul was in his embrace. "Little one! my one ewe lamb!"

Oh, how tenderly the words were said! She closed her eyes, and then, as Cranford's cheery whistle sounded in the distance, she looked up in terror, and uttered a quick cry.

"Be quiet, my dearest; for God's sake, calm yourself. Before *Him* you are mine. Ay, mine now, but mine for ever when death comes."

He looked up to heaven with flashing eyes, as he

thus fiercely gave utterance to his love. "When death comes!" he said again, and his strange passion stilled her to quietude. He strained her to his breast, and solemnly, sadly, yearningly gazed upon her, repeating once more, "When death comes." It seemed as if he were looking right through the vista of life to the *end*, when he might call her his. His words might have been a prophecy.

Lord Cranford came into the Hall. Mr. Ross was breaking a spray from the fuchsia at the door. Helena was standing in the porch, white as the jasmine stars which framed it.

"I say, Ross, you are womanish in your love of flowers," said the Earl. "If you are in league with my Lady, we shall not get far this morning, for there is never a wild rose or honeysuckle that she can pass."

Mr. Ross did not reply. He gave the spray into Helena's hand. She took it mechanically; to her dizzied senses the scarlet bells seemed like drops of blood upon her hand and his.

* * * * *

The past two years had yielded their sad harvests, reaped this morning. The falsehood with which the Earl had soothed Helena before her marriage had borne fruit in many ways. Its effect had been felt in their daily lives, and had caused no end of suspicions and of anxieties. The love which Glen Ross had permitted his heart to foster had strengthened so much, that now he could scarcely be said to live when away from the Countess; and she had somehow come to lean upon his strong mind, until her husband's height seemed lowered. She ceased to look up to him, began to refer to his friend, to think of him more than was either wise for her own happiness or prudent for him. High admiration was succeeded by love —a love which until now had been unguessed by herself. In all such cases the evil is insidious. When a woman does

so sin, she is led so gradually to it, that the very danger is unknown to herself. If all the sad histories which come before one of our courts could be truthfully revealed, step by step, from the beginning to the end, it may be that these words would be confirmed, and it would be proved beyond doubt that few women ever purposed to break the marriage vow; that no woman ever intentionally suffered her heart to be alienated from her husband. In glancing at those pitiable records, curiosity sometimes wonders how it has come to pass that there should be the name of some fair young wife not long ago a happy bride, and now a thing of scorn for the world. Surely she had been led ignorantly. She had perhaps fostered what was at first a mere sentiment, till it became a guilty feeling, which she never meant any one but herself to know of. This Platonic attachment to her husband's friend was never meant to be more than that. But her standard of principle was gradually lowered, her sense of right was weakened; and so, in some hour of temptation, this germ of sentiment blossomed into a great sin, for which she might never in this life sufficiently repent.

They went on towards Dummail Raise, not by the high road, but along a bridle-path, which was now and then almost lost in a wood, then merged on to some broad green pasture, or ran by the side of a beck. Thus changing, it was one of the loveliest walks that could be imagined, with the grand old mountains round keeping their eternal watch, seeming almost like patriarchs standing with uplifted hands to bless the valley at their feet.

Helena walked like a somnambulist. All that she was conscious of was the delicious thought that Mr. Ross loved her. In those first moments of thrilling joy, she never looked beyond that one sweet conviction—she never paused to think of his treachery to his friend. She had so reverenced him, so esteemed him, that she would have

scorned the charge of evil in him. She only felt that he loved her—and how could he help that? she would have argued. Was he to be blamed for the irrepressible feeling of his heart? Had she reasoned at all, she would have reasoned thus, and, with tears of passion, she would have flung back the charge of unfaithfulness to her husband. She unfaithful! She only knew that from their first interview Mr. Ross had impressed her as none other ever had; that, after long-continued friendly intimacy, he had risen in her esteem, and had never said a word, or done an action, which was not worthy the highest and the best; that he was her standard of all that was noble and great. And now his latest words were still ringing upon her ear, thrilling her soul: "Mine when death comes!" Ah, that was worth dying for! Who beside him would have given utterance to such a thought? What other man was there who would have so dignified his love for her as to put it beyond this life—beyond this earth? It was no mere passing fancy: Glen Ross could wait for her until they had done with time—*then*, yes, then, he would claim her, and she would be his there.

"Yes, it was worth dying for!" she said to herself, as she thought these thoughts, and walked in that pretty path, with her head bent, and her eyes unwatchful of the flowers, regardless of the trees and becks, that she "raved about," her husband had said, and she looked so scared when he laid his hand upon her shoulder, that he laughed, and inquired, "What in the world she was pondering over?"

Mr. Ross turned his head towards her. Involuntarily she looked at him, and then a scarlet glow chased her almost marble paleness.

"What is the matter?" asked Lord Cranford, with a very surprised expression.

"Nothing!" she answered.

"Nothing! This is scarcely a courteous welcome to our friend, Helena."

She turned her head away from him. Oh, if he had but seen the mute agony written on her face; for her husband's voice had suddenly shown to her her real position. Glen saw it, and could scarcely bear his own weight of self-condemnation.

"You are a changeling!" the Earl said, with kind raillery. "I'll see what those floral pets of yours will do." He broke through a thin hedge, and went to a stream where some flowers were growing.

She stood still watching him, with great pain of feeling, because, notwithstanding many differences, his love for her was continually manifested in trifles.

Mr. Ross came to her. "My darling," he whispered, "I dare not stay with you. I have been thinking it all over. Ours is a miserable fate, but we must bear it. I will leave you whilst it be possible."

His words smote her with terrible force. "Oh, Glen!" she exclaimed, in an agonized tone. Then Cranford called to her cheerfully not to come, for the ground was wet there. "Yes, Mr. Ross," she went on, earnestly, "you had better leave me now;" but, as she spoke, her lips quivered, her voice faltered, and she burst into tears. Control was out of the question—beyond his power, beyond her own. Her old wild impetuosity, which had slumbered, was not dead. Now it showed itself. It came leaping, defying danger, consequences, husband —ay, the whole world. She dashed away her tears, and, with burning cheeks, in quick, nervous tones, she said, "I *do* love you, Mr. Ross, because you first showed me how to live a life worth living. I never knew myself—never knew what I might be, what I might do, what powers had been given to me, what talents, until I knew *you*. You tried to raise me—you have loved me as a com-

panion, as a woman: *he* only loves me as a child, or a toy. If he wants companionship, he does not come to me—I am only for his careless hours, only his amusement. You first taught me to think. With you for a guide, I might become worthy of even your love. It was all this that made me give you my heart, and—now, we must part. Heaven help me! I shall be desolate."

The change from the rapid utterance to the mournfulness of the last words was very painful to him. Before he could speak, the Earl came back with his hands full of flowers.

"Here, my child," he said, not looking at her though, for he was arranging them, "confess, now, that in all your gatherings you were never so successful, and there are hundreds more. It is quite a paradise."

There was the wild Solomon's seal, Aaron's rod, Jacob's staff, Esau's tears, and Bethlehem's stars—for you know England's rural piety has baptized many a wilding blossom with a "scripture name"—gathered together, with feathery grass, they did form a beautiful bouquet.

"And here," said Cranford, "are the most precious, in fact, I may say, the sentiments of my offering, some Forget-me-nots. What do I deserve for them?" He handed the flowers to her.

She could not help it—her answer was a great sob.

He looked in dismayed astonishment.

"I don't think the Countess is well," said Mr. Ross, hastily, "she seems so very tired."

"My poor child," said Longleat, throwing down the flowers, and supporting her with his arm, "how thoughtless I have been! I might have known from your manner that you were tired. Ross, my good fellow, will you see if the pony is coming? I ordered Jackson to follow with it. Mr. Ross ran down the path, and then every word of tenderness, every gentle caress of her husband's,

was a stab to Helena. He blamed himself until she was glad she had a reason for defending him.

Mr. Ross returned without tidings of the pony.

"Surely there is an old tree, or a stile, or a rock, on which we can rest," said Cranford.

At that moment an elderly gentleman came along the path. He was reading, and wore a straw hat with a broad brim that almost hid his face. Hearing their voices, he looked up. The Earl thought he recognized him, and raised his hat. He came forward and inquired, courteously, if he could be of service. Evidently he suspected they had lost their way, for it was a very retired path.

"I am at home here," he said; "I think you are strangers?"

"Partially so," answered the Earl. "My cottage is by the lake. The fact is, that this lady has walked too far. She is not well. We were looking for a seat."

The gentleman looked at her. Whether it was the presence of a stranger, or the benignity of his massive face, that aroused the Countess to her wonted dignity, might be a question; but she drew from her husband's arm, and said, "I am quite well, Cranford; indeed, I was not over tired—only foolish."

The Earl and the gentleman smiled.

"If you will permit me, sir, I can take you to a cottage close by, where the lady can rest," he said.

"Thank you," answered Cranford, "I shall be glad if you will. The pony will follow us immediately."

With the courteous gallantry of days long gone, the stranger offered his arm to Helena. Now and then he stole a side glance at her face, which he thought wondrously beautiful. It appealed to his poetic nature. He longed to know more of her.

"You said you were at home, sir," Cranford remarked. "I think I am correct in my surmise. You are——"

"William Wordsworth. That is my name," said the stranger, simply.

Helena looked up quickly. He looked down with his brightest smile.

"I am so glad to have seen you, sir. I was reading the 'Childless Father,' and the 'Last of the Flock,' yesterday. I thank you."

"To be read with appreciation is all the return I ask, lady."

They passed round the rocks, and there, nestling in the hill-side, with a broad valley on one side, a deep ravine on the other, was a tiny cottage. A narrow path ran along its whitewashed wall, with a low hedge bordering it; beyond was a gay little garden. Two white-haired children stood by the door, watching their father, who was working at a bench. There was an air of stillness about the cottage—so still, that the monotonous tapping of his hammer, very gently done, sounded distinct above the rush of the waterfall close by. A pet lamb stood beside the man; now and then it bleated. One of the children put her hand upon its head to quiet it. "Niver heed, bairn," he said, "niver heed its blaät now."

They were so near the gate, they heard what he said.

"Will you stay a moment?" asked Mr. Wordsworth, politely; for he saw something unusual there. At the sound of his footsteps, the man and the two little girls turned round. Then they all saw he was making a tiny coffin.

"How is this?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Eh, Mr. Wordsworth, we've lost our bairn." The man wiped his eyes on his shirt-sleeve. "It wur seized two days ago, an' I wur fain to see it goo, it wur in such pain; but mother's heart is nigh broken."

"Poor baby," said Mr. Wordsworth; "it was only last week that I said it would be the pride of our valley."

"Yo did, sir, yo did."

The mother came to the door then, and at the sight of their visitor she sobbed loudly.

The Earl saw him go into the cottage, and only waited his return to thank him; but Mr. Wordsworth appeared in a few moments, and opened the gate.

"Pray walk in," he said. "They have lost their baby," addressing Helena particularly, as if her sympathy would be deepest. "It was a lovely child, and a great pet of mine. No, it will be no intrusion—rather the contrary."

They scarcely liked to enter; yet Helena's pale cheeks told that rest was needed.

The little window was not shaded, for fuchsias almost hid the hills and the valley; but everything in the cottage was covered with white. The oak chest, the "settle," the little glass, the cushion on the arm-chair—all were so white that snow might have drifted in.

And the bereaved mother, with true northern hospitality, went in and out of her larder for such refreshments as she thought it indispensable to offer; but her feet stepped very noiselessly. You might have guessed what sorrow there was in her heart.

"Don't," said the Earl, as gently and as politely as if he were speaking to his Queen, "pray don't disturb yourself in your great trouble. This lady only requires rest."

Her mild blue eyes looked at him gratefully.

"You are verra welcome, sir," she faltered. "The young leddy looks as if some new milk wouldn't hurt her. She is verra bonnie, sir. I ask pardon; but I have just lost one as were more like an angel than aught. The sight o' this leddy brings her back like."

They were all silent. Mr. Wordsworth stood with his arm on the back of Helena's chair, looking at her very earnestly. She had never seen a corpse—as you know,

her whole nature recoiled from death in any form. She was unaware that in the country it is deemed a compliment to ask to see the dead; but something impelled her to rise, and ask the mother if she might see the child.

"And welcome, thank ye kindly, leddy," she said. Slipping off her shoes on the threshold, as if the place were sacred, the woman unlatched the door, with a cautious gentleness that would not have disturbed the babe if sleeping. The window was shaded; bunches of lavender were on its sill. The four-post bed, hung with blue and white check, had its curtains looped back with "Love ribbon," a white sheet was spread over its coverlet; but there was no corpse there. The mother went to the other side, and beckoned to Helena.

In an old-fashioned wooden cradle lay the dead child. The wood was covered with white linen, which was also festooned with ribbon. But for the rigid, marble look, you might have believed that the infant had just been hushed to sleep, and laid to rest by its mother, only to awaken to lovelier, rosier life. But, no; the rose would never come back to the rounded cheek; that violet line, which ran between the long fair lashes, would never again widen to the full-orbed glance. Never more! There was the stillness of the sleep that is eternal!

"Ah, lovely appearance of death!" can never be said, excepting by the corpse of a babe.

The Countess knelt by the cradle, awed as she had never been. There was majesty on the brow. The waves of this life had worn no furrows there. A cold, harsh world had never been known to the spirit that had fled. Tenderest love had hushed the baby cry, and kissed the quivering pout to dimpled smiles, in whose sunshine the momentary tear became a radiant gem. And now, from that care even God had taken the little one to his safer keeping.

There was an expression on the face such as the first glimpse of heaven might have left. The tiny lips were slightly parted, as in wonder; the wee hands were clasped on the breast. It might have been in adoration.

"It died so," said the mother, in a whisper, "and father said, 'Let t' little hands bide.'"

A white rosebud had been placed within the waxen fingers. It was not so fair as the babe. The mysteries of the unknown world—its glories, unguessed by the wisest on earth, undreamt by the greatest divine—were now all revealed to that mother's little one. Well might she stand beside it with stilled sobs and reverent gaze, for the child she mourned beheld the face of its Father who is in heaven.

The door opened softly: Mr. Wordsworth came in. Helena did not hear him; she laid her head down on the cradle side, and sobbed hysterically. The mother and Mr. Wordsworth both left the room hastily. Lord Cranford had gone away to see if the pony were coming. Mr. Ross was on the step.

"I think the young lady is over-excited. Will you go to her, sir?" said Mr. Wordsworth.

He went instantly, and closed the chamber door. Bending over her, he whispered soothing words, so that she ceased to weep; and, as he held her hand, they both gazed at the child in silence.

When the woman returned, she looked anxiously at the Countess, who said to her, very mournfully, "Be thankful; your baby is *safe*."

The mother shook her head, and, as she covered the little face, she faltered, "If it had pleased the Lord, I'd rather have taken care on it a bit longer."

Mr. Ross did not attempt to speak one word of consolation. Indeed, he was too full of misery himself.

They were leaving the room, when Helena turned, and looked wistfully at the cradle.

"What is it, my precious one?" he whispered.

Her brows contracted: she clasped her hands tightly. "Oh, I wish *I* were there! I wish I were there!"

He shuddered, and took her quickly out into the sunshine, where the Earl was waiting to take her home.

Ah! well might she long to exchange places with the sinless child. And could they who loved her have looked into the future, would they not rather have laid her that day beneath the trees in Grasmere, than have wailed for her in the time to come!

Well, we who have inherited sin have also eaten of the tree of knowledge; and none who suffer for their transgressions can righteously declare their condemnation is unjust.

Mr. Wordsworth walked back with them by the side of Helena's pony. Her heart warmed to the kind and beautiful nature of the Laureate. In his conversation she found a something which stilled her excitement, and made that strange event of the morning seem a greater sin.

Cranford had never seen her so listless. She waited to be assisted from her pony. All her elasticity had gone.

"You are very tired, my child," he said, tenderly.

Her look at him was unspeakably sad.

Mr. Wordsworth held her hand in his as he said farewell. "I am afraid, my dear, I have helped to sadden you this morning," he said; "but it was written long ago, that it is good sometimes to go to the house of mourning. You will pardon an old man for having thrown a shadow over you. It may be a needful lesson now and then to one so bright, so lovely; but let me remind you, in atonement, that 'Life is a journey, crowned with blessings to the end!'"

She withdrew her hand in silence, but with a reluctant

grace, that told him feeling caused it. Then she went away, and he never saw her again.

"I am leaving home to-morrow, my Lord," he said, as they exchanged cards; "but come to the 'Mount.' Nature will atone for my absence."

He went down the lane towards the church. Cranford leaned over the gate, watching him. The next time he sought the kind friend of that day, it was beneath the yews, where the simple slab told him "William Wordsworth" was at rest.

"Mr. Ross begs you will excuse him at dinner, my Lord," the servant said who announced it.

The Countess had just entered the drawing-room from the garden. Radiantly beautiful she looked; the fuchsia in her hair was not more brilliant than her lips. She was fastening some of the same flowers in her band.

"Helena, excuse me a moment," Cranford said. He went upstairs and tapped at Mr. Ross's door. There was a pause. Then a heavy step crossed the room. "Glen, my dear fellow, are you ill? Why, what in the world is the matter? You are as white as a ghost."

"I have one of my worst headaches, Longleat, that is all. Just give me an hour or two, and then send me a cup of coffee. I shall be yours for the rest of the evening."

"All right," said the Earl; "her Ladyship is waiting. I did hope you had conquered these attacks. You fellows with brain always suffer."

He went down. Mr. Ross closed the door, fastened it, and threw himself on the couch. For a time he lay as still as if every faculty of life were suspended. Then he rose, and paced the room in uncontrollable perturbation. Much as he loved Helena, he would have given years of his life to have blotted out that morning. He had done that which must separate them—that which could never be undone.

He had made up his mind to leave her at whatever cost—he would do *that*. Then came to his remembrance the quiver of her lips, the plaintive cry, when she heard his decision, and her sad tone as she said, "I *shall* be desolate."

He buried his face in his hands, and groaned aloud, "Oh, God help me! help me!"

Never was human prayer more sincere, never wrung from keener anguish. It was no sentimental fancy, no mere passion; she was to him now the life of his life, the soul of his soul. If need be he would have died for her. This was his great love, and this was why he vowed to leave her—to leave her with a fair, unsullied name, to him who was her rightful protector, the husband who loved her so well. Her wild, almost passionate words in the lane that morning, had told him how much she cared for him; "but she will forget me," he said, "she will be happy again. And I will leave her now, before it is too late—now, whilst I can, and whilst her name is unsullied My one ewe lamb!"

Even in the solitude of his room he called her thus tenderly, and smiled an exquisite smile of gentlest love. What mattered *his* wearied life, his sad heart, if only she were at peace! Presently he heard a light step. His face flushed in an instant. Then a tap followed. He opened the door. Helena stood there with a cup of coffee.

"Cranford thought I might, that I had better bring it to you myself," she said, timidly.

He took the cup from her, and led her by the hand into the room.

"Can you give me a few moments? they will be the last," he said, in a low voice; but his tone was firm and calm.

He made room on the table for the little cup. Although he had only occupied this apartment since yesterday, how

like him it seemed! The Earl had furnished it expressly for him. It was even written on the door "Mr. Ross' study." But this time last evening Cranford had pointed that out to him, and how merrily they had laughed! And now he said these moments with her were the last!

All these thoughts rushed through Helena's mind during the moment he was removing the books.

"Cranford has gone for an hour's row, Mr. Ross. He thought by then your head would be better. Is it better?"

He did not answer; he was looking at her earnestly; and ah, so mournfully! She raised her eyes; then, he opened his arms. She went to him, laid her head upon his breast, and sighed wearedly.

"My darling," he whispered in a while, "I can never, never forget this. All my life—lonely and sad as I know it will be—all my life I shall find comfort in the thought that you loved me. Comfort did I say? Yes, happiness, so that I would not change lives with any man. I am going to leave you, my little one; nay, rest still, dear," as she raised her head quickly, "I am going to leave you, because you are not mine; and I would rather die a torturing, lingering death, God knows, than hurt one golden hair." He paused and heaved a deep sigh. "If I stayed, dear, what could follow, but a hollow happiness; that would be madness, for it could only have one termination, the same as that now—separation, and greater misery after loving more, if it be possible, than even we love now. We cannot love without sin; let me bear that away, my child, as I would the punishment."

The ineffable tenderness of his tone as he said these words cannot be described. She did not weep, nor sob; only a slight shiver ran through her, as if she were chilled by a keen wind.

He laid his olive-tinted cheek upon her fair brow. So

they stood, silent now, looking on the hills that were glorious in the sunset light. Purple shadows were creeping where the golden haze had rested; the lake was dark, save where the ripples caught a crimson flush, and all the valley was at peace. It was nature's holiest hour. Her calm influence tranquillized their troubled souls and rebuked their passion.

She raised her head, and said, "Yes, Mr. Ross, you must go." Then she buried her face in her hands.

"Don't make it harder," he whispered, being afraid to trust his voice; "I can bear it, my child, if you are happy. Have I not borne my fate for the past two years? I have loved you ever since that day at Richmond. Do you remember it?"

Remember it! Ah, did she not! The violets were withered long ago, lying where she had placed them that night; and now she could look back upon it as the beginning of days that had been the beginning of sorrows as well as of joys to them both.

"I remember," she said, sadly.

"Well, darling, I loved you before then; but it was on that day that I fore-saw the end."

"You loved me before then?" she said.

"Yes, dear, I bought your likeness which Marachetti sold in Manchester. I could not have passed *that* face for worlds. I had never seen anything like it, yet it was a face I had longed for, and often pictured in my day dreams, only far more lovely. It was with me ever after then. I was told the original lived, and I determined I would seek her. Longleat knew it all, and never told me, or——" he stopped, his face darkened; but as if he could not bear to pain her, he turned aside his head.

"I never knew the truth," he went on, "until that meeting. "I must not blame him, for God knows I have done him a greater wrong!"

His tone of self-condemnation was bitter.

"Don't, Mr. Ross," she said; "you could not help loving me." Like a child that thinks its mother's kiss can take away a pain, she raised his hand to her lips and kissed it.

A beautiful expression—a light came into his eyes.

"Bless you, heaven for ever bless you, my own! Yet not my own until death comes."

It was strange how that one wailing thought ran through all his utterances. The minutes went on. Sunset tints had faded; there was a glimmer on the hill-brows, and that pale opal light, in which mountains always seem more solemn and majestic. A single planet burned upon the ridge of Fairfield, "an untended watch-fire." It shone radiantly in the serene heaven; everything was so still that they could hear the dipping of Cranford's oars as he rowed towards home.

"I must leave you now, Mr. Ross," she said, softly; "heaven only knows how guilty I seem in its pure light; but heaven only knows why I love you. If we never meet until we have entered the land where love may be without sin, there you will know how deep mine is. It can never, never pass away."

She was turning away from him, but he said, "Stay a moment," and went into his dressing-room beyond. In a moment he returned with a small case in his hand. He opened it and gave it to her.

"Oh, how beautiful!" she exclaimed, almost breathless with delight.

It was a child's head by Guido; one of those marvellous creations of his, which sometimes lead one to believe that he had glimpses of angelic faces.

"I purchased it with the intention of giving it to you some day," he said; "that was in the days when I only had your portrait; but I thought them companion-pictures.

I believed the time would come when you could receive it. None so fitting as this my child, for it is like the Sabbath among my days; and as the Sabbath," he said, sadly smiling, "its evening is the prelude to a week of weariness and toil."

He closed the case, and folded her to his heart again. With a weary sigh, he released her, as they heard Cranford moor his boat upon the stones.

An hour later, Mr. Ross entered the room where the Earl was sitting. The letter-bag lay upon the table. "How is the head, old fellow?" inquired the Earl.

"Better, thank you. Any letters for me, Longleat?"

His languid manner vanished as Cranford handed a number to him. For the next quarter of an hour there was complete silence in the room, excepting when Mr. Ross laid sheet after sheet aside.

"Well," said Cranford, laughing at Glen's nervous start when he spoke. "That last seems to have been a momentous epistle."

"It is, rather."

"Nothing wrong, I hope."

"No; but a little provoking. I must leave for London in the morning."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said Cranford, rising, and throwing his paper down. "You promised to give me a month; and I shall have it, my dear fellow! What nonsense."

"Unfortunately, Longleat, it is a fact; go, I *must*."

"Helena," her husband called, in a vexed tone, "do you hear this. Come and lay your commands upon this faithless knight."

She was seated in the window; the blind was not down—the moon shone full upon her face, and the shadows of the leaves were thrown upon her brow, almost like a veil.

"I hear, Cranford," she answered, in a low voice.

"You hear!" he echoed, impatiently; "then why don't you forbid him to go?"

"I cannot. Mr. Ross says he *must*."

"I never knew such an absurd thing in my life," said the Earl, striding up and down the little drawing-room at the imminent risk of upsetting chairs and tables. "What business can you possibly have in town now, that your solicitors cannot transact for you? You won't find a soul there, Ross."

"Possibly not, Longleat," answered Mr. Ross, smiling good-humouredly. "The windows will be all barred up, the parks will be deserts, and Regent Street will be covered with grass!"

"Pshaw!" said Cranford, turning away, "and if it were so you would be in your element. You talk about your lonely life, and as soon as ever you come to your *home*, to your *brother* and his wife, you are dissatisfied, and after a few hours, must needs fly off at a tangent. Why, I purposely arranged to be here now for your sake, instead of in Scotland. I thought we were to have had such a nice time together."

Mr. Ross looked up, as Cranford came to his side. He was touched by his manner—touched beyond power of expression; besides, there was that in his heart and on his conscience which made him feel verily guilty. "Longleat," he said, "your happiness does seem to make my life sadder by contrast. Do you think that if it were not an urgent necessity that I would leave you and this sweet place? I thank you, truly thank you, for calling yours my home. When I leave it, I leave all that makes this world dear."

It was impossible to doubt his sincerity.

"But cannot you come back, Ross?"

He shook his head. "I fear not."

"Helena," Cranford said, testily, "why are you sitting in the dark there, as if you cared nothing about this ridiculous whim?—the most provoking you ever took into your head, Ross, and you have had plenty in your time."

Mr. Ross smiled, grimly. "Yes," he said; "but I may be pardoned, perhaps, for this one, inasmuch as it is to my own hurt."

Helena had left the window, and seated herself by the table. She was deathly pale, for this was a terrible ordeal to her—to seem indifferent when her heart was breaking was hard indeed; but how dared she utter one word? How true it is that guilt makes cowards of us all. But yesterday she would have spoken with the freedom of a child, and have supported her husband's arguments and remonstrances with all the force she could; but it was different now.

"*Must* you go, Mr. Ross, through this letter?" she asked, suddenly, for now the idea struck her that if he *were* leaving on business he might return. The very thought brought color into her cheeks, as indeed it brought it into his face, for he was quite unprepared for such a question, and thrown off his guard. He looked at her an instant. Cranford also looked at her in surprise.

"Of course," he said, "didn't you hear him say it was an important letter, and one that necessitated his going. Why do you ask this?"

She looked confused, and Glen, rallying his forces, answered for her, "My dear Longleat, after having brought all manner of charges against me—being so full of whims, etc., etc.—surely her Ladyship may be allowed to ask if this be a whim."

The Earl laughed.

"And," said Mr. Ross, "I can only give your Ladyship this reply: that nothing but the strongest sense of

duty, the sternest law of necessity, would make me leave this paradise, for," rising as he spoke, and looking into the Earl's eyes with a frank, unquailing gaze, "when I do leave it, Longleat, as I said, I leave all that gives life joy, all that makes it endurable. Don't say more. It is hard enough."

If ever a face showed power and firmness, mingled with a sweetness of expression, that shed an ineffable charm over it such as cannot be described, Mr. Ross's did then. To Helena, it fully revealed the purpose of his heart to do rightly at whatever cost to himself; and she honoured him more than she had ever done.

To Cranford, it merely expressed his great friendship, and his always rather melancholy nature. "Well, Ross," he said, "I don't know how it happens, but you always carry your point; and, as usual, I may as well yield as gracefully as I can. But you will promise this—that you will try to return; and, at any rate, you will not go wandering over the world without letting a fellow know you are alive."

"Indeed, no, Longleat. I will never neglect you again."

"And don't go riding that hobby-horse of yours—duty—to death. When you get a fit of the heroics, there is no knowing what you will do."

"I never showed so much heroism in my life as I am doing in this matter, Longleat."

"Then I can only wish that the display of the virtue had been reserved for another occasion."

They laughed at each other, and strolled into the garden, where the Countess joined them. Mr. Ross came to meet her, and drew her trembling hand through his arm. The moon shone radiantly, and the sky was blazing with stars. They walked on the bank of the lake, and Mr. Ross seemed to pour out all the riches of his mind

in his conversation. He had noticed how expressively sad her pale face looked, and he determined to bring back both the rose and the smile. He gave them droll anecdotes of his adventures; sketched scenes in wild foreign lands; described people and places, with such graphic truth and humour, that her attention was beguiled; and before long her merry little laugh rang out on the still air. He even recited—against his rule—his own poetry, sang several songs for them, ending with the "Meeting of the Waters." His rich tones floated far away, and when the song was done, they heard clapping of hands on the lake. A boat glided across the silvery track of the moon, and a manly voice shouted, "Thank you."

"Good-night," answered Mr. Ross, laughing, not knowing to whom he spoke. And then the rowers chaunted the "Canadian Boat Song." The boat glided away, and the music grew fainter and fainter until lost in the distance. That night was ever a beautiful memory to Helena.

The first sheaf of rays was shooting above the highest mountain; every rose-bud had its liquid gem, and every blade of grass its jewelled point, when Glen left the valley. He was flying from fate—his world, indeed, lay there; he dared not look beyond on his own future, but he had the comfort of knowing that, at least, he was acting rightly.

As he stepped into the early morning train at the Windermere Station, he said to himself, "Now, for fame alone!"

A time came when Longleat looked back on that morning with such anguish as no pen can picture—a time when he understood all, and wondered at his own blindness.

CHAPTER XVII.

ICHABOD.

O light of dead and of dying days!
O Love! in thy glory go,
In a rosy mist and a moving maze,
O'er the pathless peaks of snow.

But what is left for the cold grey soul,
That moans like a wounded dove?
One wine is left in the broken bowl—
'Tis—To love, and love, and love.

GEORGE MACDONALD.

HELENA heard Mr. Ross leave. She heard the sound of his steps upon the gravel, and his cheery "Good-bye" to the Earl at the gate. She heard the rumble of the wheels in the lane until it died away in the distance. And now she felt that he had gone indeed! She heard her husband speak to one of the gardeners; then the man's quick run to the house; his return; and the sound of a boat-chain grating over the stones—so she knew that he had been in for the cushions, and that the Earl was going for a row. She lay still, listening to the twittering of the birds in their nests beneath the eaves; to their chirrups and songs; to the sound of the dipping oars, and the splashings of the lake on its brim. She saw the golden sunshine creep down the mountains, and she thought—as perhaps many have thought in times of trial—"If *this* trouble had not been—I should be happy!" For, what a paradise she

gazed on through her windows! How beautiful the world lay around her!

She rose and dressed, without the assistance of her maid. Indeed, the Countess was out in the garden when that damsel was yet sleeping in her chamber.

She could scarcely summon resolution to enter the pretty room in which she had seen the housemaid busy, and had heard her singing as she moved about at her work—but breakfast was waiting for her and the Earl; and she saw his boat gliding towards home; then she went in. The letters had arrived. Mr. Ross's, from some cause, were not in the bag; they lay in a heap beside a plate, which the man had forgetfully placed for him. His chair was placed ready also. She stood beside it with a regretful tenderness.

"May God bless him," she murmured. "He is noble, and good, and true."

Then Cranford came in, and they had breakfast. Notwithstanding the refreshing influence of the morning air, he looked gloomy; and all her efforts to sustain a conversation could not win him from his vexation at Glen's going. It was a relief to both when the meal was ended.

He went to his library—she to Mr. Ross's rooms.

A pile of new books lay upon the study-table, directed to her. On the top was a sheet of paper, containing some German directions—her own exercise, sent to him by post, had been carefully copied, with its mistakes marked. The original Mr. Ross had carried away with him. She sat there a long time, feeling entirely desolate; for, in the directions so carefully given, she saw his resolution not to allow even that channel of communication between her and himself.

She sat until weary of her own thoughts; and then put on her hat, and strolled out. It was near noon, and one of the servants told her the Earl had gone to fish, and

would not return until the dinner-hour. That was a relief to her.

She went into the lane which they had traversed but yesterday. What an age ago it seemed! Yea, what a life-time! She walked along the same path, until she came in sight of the cottage; then she sat down on a rock so covered with tiny different-colored flowers, and so fringed with yellow gorse, that Mr. Ross had said it was "like a mosaic set in gold." The first sound that aroused her attention, after a long, long time, was the singing of a funeral hymn to a sweet weird tune. Then a sad procession came through the little gate. Two women carried the tiny coffin, covered with its white pall, behind which came the father and mother, the two children, and a few other followers. It struck the Countess as being a strange sight there, where Nature was so beautiful and so jubilant. The mellow sunlight, the full-leaved trees, the flashing beck, the beautiful valley, the radiant hills—how glorious they all were! But even there the mourners went about; for, everywhere, "Man goeth to his long home!"

She rose and followed. In every pause of the singing she could hear the mother's sobs. When they arrived at the church, she crept into a corner pew, and knelt down, weeping bitterly, as she recalled whose voice had comforted her as she stood but yesterday beside the dead child. She looked wistfully at the coffin when they had all left the grave, and she turned away, saying to herself even more bitterly, "I wish I were there."

From that day she saw nothing of Mr. Ross—heard nothing for weeks. She did not once, as in other days, urge her husband to write to his friend. She did nothing to renew the intercourse which had been so strangely—perhaps so fatally—broken; nor did Mr. Ross.

So the time rolled on. They left Grasmere immediately afterwards for Strathaven, the Earl's shooting-box in Scot-

land. Among the heathery moors they might have been happy—might have been, but for the history of the past two years!

General Davenant had foreseen the evil results which would follow Lord Cranford's decision; and they had all come to pass. His intensely proud nature had been chafed by his secret dread of disclosure; so that his temper became soured, irritable, and even vexatious to Helena, who could not understand it. She drew more within herself. Her loving impulses received a chill different from, and worse than, any in her early life at Calton. There had been times when the Earl had secluded himself so long, that she had gone to his library, and then seen that she was unwelcome—why, she could not imagine, unless it were that she was no longer as dear to him, no longer as necessary to his happiness, as formerly. The day had long gone by now since she ceased to visit his rooms as she had once done. There were times when his manner was the same as in the old days, and when his tenderness exceeded the power of words to express. But these precious moments were of rare occurrence. His moods were fitful and strange; and the feeling grew, almost unconsciously to herself, that she could not depend upon him. Then there was a time when she thought another tie would bind her husband's heart to her; but she could never recal that tender expectation without pain—for, mingled with Lord Cranford's passionate devotion were evidences of cold, constrained feeling—a something which to her was inexplicable. Then followed the illness which left her without promise of her babe. When Cranford had hung over her in speechless agony, because the Angel of Death seemed ready to bear from him his sweet young wife, she had looked into his eyes, and read such love as made her feel for the time she could never doubt him more. But, one day, when her recovery was progressing, she whispered

her sorrow for his disappointment; to her surprise and pain, he answered bitterly (being off his guard), "It was better so." When his mother's letter came, full of sympathy for Helena, he seemed careless of its contents, and this pained her as much as all the rest. What could it mean? It was impossible that she could even guess the truth; but a conviction—somewhat shadowy, perhaps, yet sufficiently clear to be painfully real—began to possess her, that the love she had imagined her husband felt for Margaret Seymour had returned. She felt no jealousy; but the conviction numbed her heart, embittered her feelings, withered their lives.

Had the Earl borne his trial as he boasted to the General he could bear it, or had he manfully told her the truth, much misery might have been spared to him.

Then came Glen Ross, just at the beginning of these changes, with his genial frankness and his brilliant intellect, beside whom Cranford's slightly enervated character seemed rayless. After that day at Richmond, a new element was mingled in the life of Helena: not by design on the part of either. It arose naturally from the great intimacy between Glen and Cranford, an intimacy which amounted to brotherhood. When in town for the first time after their marriage, the Earl had persuaded him to close his house and to become his guest. Then he had travelled with them on the Continent, and visited at Longleat, so that they were continually together. Mr. Ross thoroughly understood Helena, and, what is worth all the admiration in the world to woman, he appreciated her.

And he seemed to her superior to all other men. He made no effort to seem so, he shone by no borrowed light; he was simply earnest and true—earnest in everything he undertook—true to himself. Often he appeared to greater advantage by contrast with the Earl's constitutional

indolence; for while Mr. Ross possessed equal social advantages and had equal temptation to live a life of luxurious ease and pleasure, he exercised all the force and power of a self-made man. It was amazing what an amount of work he did. He threw his whole soul into all that he undertook, without ruffling that natural repose of manner so essential to the comfort of society. No one ever saw Glen idle; but no one ever saw him in a hurry, or too busy to give assistance or advice when asked for.

So invariably did the Earl, as in the old college days, lean on his friend's judgment, that Mr. Ross at last remonstrated with him. It seemed as if Longleat had gone back to the languid idleness of those days when his mother had reminded him of the duties of his high position.

All this had its effect upon Helena. She could not avoid occasionally drawing comparisons between her husband and his friend, and the result was not favourable to the Earl. Indeed, the Earl himself taught her, without knowing it, to look up to Glen rather than to himself, by always referring her to him, when she asked his own opinion upon matters of importance. This in itself was a grievous wrong; for the husband, whom God Himself has called "the head," can no more lower his dignity, or escape the responsibilities of that relation, than can the wife assume the rule without transgressing against the divine decree. There were other ways, too, in which Mr. Ross unconsciously gained an influence over Helena. His intense yet delicate sympathy was a gift as rare as it is winning. A little circumstance will perhaps explain much. The three were in the library at Longleat one morning, when Glen took up a volume of poems, and presently he began to read passages aloud. Helena was writing; but she was attracted first by his charm of voice, then by the melody of

the poem. She stole to his side, and when he looked at her he smiled to see her pretty look of eager interest. She never came near to him that he did not feel as if a lovely innocent child had come to claim his tenderest protection.

"Well little fairy, he said—for he often so called her—"for what am I wanted now?"

"Oh, that is beautiful, Mr. Ross," she said in her impulsive way; "do go on."

He read the lines to the end. It was a poem in the style of Tennyson's "Miller's Daughter." When he had finished it she thanked him warmly, and, taking the book from his hand, carried it to the other end of the room, where she sat down, and was presently absorbed in its contents. Mr. Ross quietly watched her. She started when he inquired, at last, how she liked the rest. Instead of answering his query, she said, "Oh, Mr. Ross, I do feel so ignorant; I literally know nothing."

Mr. Ross looked down upon her animated face with a tender smile—he did not himself know how tender. "That is an evil which every day can remedy," he answered lightly.

The Earl, who had been reading a newspaper, threw it aside, and, stretching his arms, said, after a prolonged yawn, "Helena, what is the good of bothering your pretty head with study?"

He spoke so like the Cranford of other days, that she laughed her pleasant little laugh, so sweet to hear.

"I like to study, Longleat."

"And I do not like you to do it," he replied. "You were never made to puzzle over books meant for stronger heads."

She did not like his tone any more than his words. The remark carried with it an assumption of superiority, such as some men feel over women, though Longleat would have been the last in the world to have acknowledged the

feeling to himself. Half conscious that some kind of inferiority in all that constitutes the real dignity of human nature was implied, if not expressed, Helena answered, with a good deal of the old fiery spirit, "Shall I be a better wife to you, Longleat, for being an ignorant one?"

"Perhaps not," he answered carelessly—for he was utterly unsuspicious of all that was passing, like sunbeams tangled in mist, through his wife's mind—and left the room.

Mr. Ross saw her color rise, and her eye flash; but he looked away from her, as if his very penetration were treachery to his friend. It cost him an effort to affect indifference, for her glance had seemed to expect some sign of his sympathy.

After that day she always found a carefully-selected book ready for her, placed unobtrusively on her own reading-stand. She devoured the contents of these precious volumes, and frequently astonished Mr. Ross by her discriminating criticisms. To him she was rapidly becoming everything. It was his one thought how he could contribute to her happiness—how best call into exercise her mental powers which were, in his opinion, of the highest order. The hours he spent with her in study—they were many, for he was a good linguist, and Helena was glad to read German and Italian authors with him—were the only portions of time he marked in his calendar; but of this he gave no sign conspicuously. If his eye grew tenderer in its glance when it rested upon her, his voice had a higher reverence in its tone, which was like a veil of frost-work round their intercourse, at once chilling, delicate, and most beautiful.

It would be impossible, however, to give an accurate delineation of Helena's conflicting feelings at this time, or of her most unhappy position. Lord Cranford's very love

had made him cowardly, and, as faltering compromises often do, had led him into infinite trouble. With more faith in his own tender care than in God's truth, and in manly honesty, how could he but fail? And in that failure, how was it possible that the heart which he would fain have spared a moment's pain could escape suffering? It is true—and a truth that cannot be too strongly enforced—that his deviations from what was strictly just can be no justification of Helena's sin. We are here speaking not of what should or ought to be, but of causes and their consequences under given conditions of character and circumstance, as worked out in two human lives. The reader's judgment must not be swayed by Helena's fascinations, or by Glen's power; nor, on the other hand, may the cold, harsh verdict of the world be righteously visited upon a heart so deeply wounded and torn by emotion as hers. A judgment founded on the immutable law of right, which takes into account every extenuating circumstance, and recognizes the binding law of morality on which society is founded, will be tempered by mercy, as are the judgments of the All-mighty and All-seeing.

Not suddenly, but step by step, Helena came to love this man—not one sign of their love being given until that last scene at Grasmere.

It was the end of the chain, the first link of which was forged at Richmond that spring day.

Yet not the end!

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GATES OF HADES.

Is it indeed so? If I lay here dead,
Would'st thou miss any life in losing mine,
And would the sun for thee more coldly shine,
Because of grave-damps falling round my head?]

* * * * * *

Then love me—love! look on me . . . breathe on me!
As brighter ladies do not count it strange
For love to give up acres and degree,
I yield the grave for thy sake, and exchange
My near, sweet view of heaven, for earth with thee!

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING.

A CHEERLESS December day was drawing to its close, when a travelling-carriage dashed at a rapid rate along a retired road in the south of England. In the frosty air the rattle of the hoofs and the rumble of the wheels sounded afar, startling the robins in the hedges, that were "like brown leaves that had forgotten to drop," as Currer Bell says in her terse style, and rousing the farm watch-dogs to angry barks. Suddenly the rumble ceased, and, as a beggar-woman, with a child slung upon her back, turned a bend in the lane, she saw a gentleman alight. "Robert," she heard him say, "light the reading-lamp. I will walk up the hill."

Then a lady's voice inquired, gently, "Are we far from Longleat, Latham?"

"Not far, my Lady," he said, briskly; "only fourteen miles."

The Earl opened it hastily. Helena came to him in her natural curiosity, and looked over his shoulder.

"DEAR LORD CRANFORD,—On my way to Marston this morning I saw the Greys coming from Longleat, and I heard you were expected here early to-day. I have called again on my return, but cannot wait. Don't be surprised if I am at the Hall to-night. I am very wishful to see you about a circumstance that has just come to my knowledge. Probably you know it too. Love to Helena. —I remain, yours truly, "ARTHUR DAVENANT."

"What can papa mean?" said Helena. "What is it all about Cranford?"

"How can I tell?" he answered, in that testy way he had now sometimes, and which she disliked so much.

"Cannot you guess," she said, looking at him so earnestly that he was confused. "You always strike me as having a secret, Cranford."

"A—a secret!" he stammered.

"I have thought so sometimes," she said, gently—"many times since my marriage, as I was led to think it before."

For a moment he was tempted to answer, "I have one which I have kept through my love for you," but he did not. It would have been better said, the whole burden would have been removed from his mind. But then there was his mother. Once tell it, how could he guarantee its further safety? So he would not. As he deliberated, she turned away, and his deliberation cost him a fearful price.

How little did those two think that in that lowly room, with its portrait of his father, the late Earl, looking down upon them, they were there brought face to face with Fate! Little did the Earl dream that for one brief moment he held in his hands her destiny and his—that if he could

but brave a present trial for a future good, by telling her the secret he every day dreaded she would hear; that if he could have shown her all his heart, which once sacrificed the pride inherited from all his race, and deemed it no sacrifice for the love he bore her, that the whole current of Helena's history would be changed. Little did he dream this, or that the chance lost now would never more return.

She sat by the fire sipping her tea. He had taken up an old "Times." Glancing at the date, he said, "This is curious, this paper happens to be one of the two that missed its way to Strathaven."

She did not answer.

Suddenly he exclaimed, "What in the world can ail him?" He read:—

"We regret to learn that the health of Mr. Glen Ross, M.P., causes the greatest anxiety to his friends. His physicians prescribe total retirement from active life for the present, which we fear will be almost impossible to one so indefatigable and energetic, as the member for South Henley."

She rose from her chair; her hand so trembled that the cup rattled in the saucer as she put it down. She almost snatched the paper from him to read for herself.

Her face was deathly white. "Oh, Cranford," she said, "you will go to him." She spoke so vehemently, that he was astonished. "He must not die; you will not leave him, ill and alone?"

"Why, Helena," he said, "I never thought you cared so much for dear old Ross. Bless you, dear, yes, I will go to him."

He put his arm round her and kissed her forehead, and then she hid her face upon his breast and sobbed aloud.

"What is it, dear?" he asked in alarm.

"I was startled by papa's note," she said, raising her

tear-stained face; "and now this seems so sad about Mr. Ross. And Cranford, we are not happy as we had used to be. I know you did love"—some one else, she was going to say, but she remembered her own love for Glen, and was silent.

He mistook her meaning. "'I *did* love you, Helena!' Yes, and God knows how I love my darling now," he said, tenderly stroking her cheek.

"Yes you did," she said sadly, "but——"

"But what, dear?"

"I think you try to hide it from me; that I am not to you the same as in the other time. I often see it, Longleat. You are cross with me and cold, and get vexed at trifles." She stopped again.

"My poor Helena!" he raised her face, by putting his hand under her chin, and there was an expression in his eyes so touchingly beautiful, so full of tender devotion, that it seemed impossible any doubt should ever again fling its dark shadow over their lives. He was not altogether sorry to think that jealousy of his love had made her sad.

"Don't misjudge my feeling, Cranford," she said. "I don't blame you. Nay, I beg your pardon."

He did not understand her, this Earl, whose long, stainless race had known no blot, until she, ah, how unconsciously! had stirred in his heart the conflicting emotions of pride and love. Perhaps he had deceived himself as well as her, when he deposed the pride of race, and acknowledged love alone for his King and Lord. But he had brought her to his house, and as he looked at her he grew pitiful. very pitiful and tender. Not dreaming why she pleaded his forgiveness, but only seeing her heart's heaviness, he laid her head again upon his breast, and a tear from his eye fell on its gold. It was the last he ever shed there

After they were in the carriage, Helena thought of the

first time she entered Longleat on that beautiful autumnal evening, of the children's hymn, and her mother's welcome. Would that mother, whose eyes were so keen for the happiness of her son, detect the change in their lives, and was it possible she could divine the cause?

A cold shiver went through Helena at the thought. And just then they passed the first lodge.

It was starlight, and the moon shone; but moon and stars paled before the blaze in the hall windows—they were so brilliantly illuminated.

"There is my mother, God bless her!" exclaimed Cranford. Almost before the carriage had stopped he had bounded up the steps into the entrance, where she stood surrounded by servants.

Helena saw their meeting, then his quick return for herself; she was greatly agitated.

"Your father is here," he said as they ascended the steps together; Helena saw that the General was by the Dowager's side. His greeting was as in days gone by, coldly dignified, kindly courteous.

In an hour they were all at dinner.

Helena noticed that the Dowager looked at her curiously.

"My dear," she said at last, "you are altered; you seem taller. Does not Evans dress your hair differently?"

Lord Cranford answered. "Yes," he said, "she altered it when in Grasmere. Ross and I liked it so."

Helena blushed scarlet; but her consciousness escaped notice, because the General at the same moment, asked if he meant the member for Henley.

"Yes, why?" said the Earl.

"Because I hear he is a dying man."

"Good God!" Cranford exclaimed.

And the Dowager said with great feeling, "Oh, I hope not!"

Helena alone was silent, but had they noticed they

might have seen how ashen white her face had grown, and how her eyes dilated.

"From whom did you hear this, General."

"Is he a friend of yours, my Lord?"

"My dearest on earth."

"You are unfortunate in your attachments, I fear," he said.

Cranford flushed. "How did you hear?" he asked again.

"Oh, his illness has been known generally, he being such a prominent man; but I heard fuller particulars from your friend, Mr. Edward Seymour, who has been in town."

Cranford looked at his mother. "I shall go up after Christmas Day. I can't stand suspense where he is concerned."

"No, Cranford, we cannot."

General Davenant glanced from one to the other; he saw how dear to them Mr. Ross was.

When the ladies left, the Earl inquired what the General's note meant.

"Don't you know, Lord Cranford?"

"I do not."

The General sipped his wine before he spoke:—"I received a letter a while ago from that Bronwylfa priest, which told me a somewhat singular circumstance. A man had died in a Manchester prison. In his last hours he made a confession, which proved that he was the gardener who assisted my first wife to palm off the story of her death. The minister who visited him was Edward Seymour; but there was a priest present: that priest happened to be the brother of the Bronwylfa fellow. The man named his mother as having been a witness of the marriage. They have found her. Of course, all this was detailed to me with the necessary additions to make the story complete," the General said, scornfully. "It was one of

those catch-penny scandals which Holy Mother Church loves so well. I wished to know for myself how much Mr. Edward Seymour knew. I saw him in town, and having adroitly introduced the subject, I soon found that he was ignorant of the names of the actors. One remark he then made startled me. He said, 'When I returned from the jail, I found Mr. Ross at my house, and I told him of the story. Probably he has named it elsewhere, because somehow the fact has transpired, and a priest has called upon him, perhaps to substantiate my statements, or to add to them—who knows?' "

Lord Cranford, toying with some grapes, let them fall on to his plate again.

The General said, "Possibly, Mr. Ross may name it to you. It is for your sake that I dread exposure. You have acted very nobly, very faithfully to my child. This is not a question of fortune. I am ready to settle upon my wife any sum, if she will only state her wishes; but, you see, instead of straightforward, honest dealing, their object seems to be to keep me and you in constant dread. I cannot understand their motives. So far as I am concerned, I don't care. And for Helena, I could have removed her from all possible evils."

"I know that," interrupted the Earl; "and because I know it, as I am a man, I am resolved to hide this from her, and from my mother. My love exposed her to peril."

They both rose, those two men, so tried: one, so strong in his iron will; the other, so strong in his devoted love, and yet so fearful! Thus they separated.

When the Dowager and Helena left the dining-room, the former said, "We will go to your boudoir, dear." And there, as at her first coming to Longleat, Elspie stood. Helena did not meet her as then. She looked startled, then pleased. Going to her, she kissed the dame, and, without a word, laid her head upon her breast.

Elspie was not prepared for this. "Eh, bairnie," she said, "but ye come like a shot birdlin'. Ye are nae wounded?"

In the old childlike way, Helena raised her face; her violet eyes were full of earnest feeling—almost of entreaty.

Elspie's heart was tender to the core for her nursling. "Ye hae winged back, my birdie," she faltered, "and I canna greet; but I'm shucken* wi' your look."

This was a terrible ordeal for Helena, yet she neither stirred nor spoke.

The Dowager, with instinctive delicacy, had left them together. She had seen an alteration in the young Countess in more ways than one. "If there is anything the matter, Elspie will find it out," she thought. Oh! what a different Christmas meeting this was from that she had looked for! Her son seemed careworn; Helena grave. Lady Cranford longed for the old merry, ringing laugh, now that its music was silenced.

Helena sat down at her old nurse's knee. "Elspie, will you always love me?" she asked, suddenly.

"Miss Helena!"

That worn face grew sublime in its truth. Mingled with the pain which such a question gave to her expression, was the concentrated devotion of a clan to its chief. All the true and faithful past rushed even to her recollection—the donor of it all; and she said, in faltering tones, "Is it auld Elspie that maun tell ye noo her heart's true?"

"No, no, nurse. I was cruel to ask you that, but——" The Countess laid her head on the lap of the serving-woman, and burst into tears.

Elspie could not speak. So Lady Cranford found them. And then the dame's thought for her darling's dignity gave her strength. "My Leddy," she said, "the dear bairn—I'm meanin' the Countess o' Longleat—is nae weel,

* Shaken.

an' she's greetin' on the knees that nursed her sae lang syne."

The Dowager's faintest of sighs caught Elspie's jealous ears. She said, almost angrily, "Ye've wanted yer auld nest, bairnie; my ain wing sheltered ye ance; ye hae felt the cauld syne."

"Nay, nurse," said the Dowager, kindly, "I am sure the Countess has known nothing but love since she left you. Have you, dear?"

Helena did not exactly reply; she murmured something, and said she would go down again with Lady Cranford. She went to her dressing-room, whither Lady Cranford followed her.

"My love," she said, "I was very very anxious about you at one time; very sorrowful for your disappointment, very regretful that I was too feeble to come and be a mother to you."

Helena's neck and face turned scarlet. "Thank you, Lady Cranford," she answered. "I thought I should feel it to be a terrible trial; but I did not after Longleat said 'It was better so!'" Her beautiful lips curled.

"Nay, my dear, Cranford would not say that."

"Yes, and he had his reasons, perhaps. Will you, mamma," she said, suddenly, and earnestly, "give me this promise—that if you see any change in either of us, you will not notice it. A long time ago, I suspect Cranford loved some one else, and I think he has not forgotten her. I would not pain you by naming it; but I don't want you to speak to him of the change. He cannot help it;" and then she added, what rang in Lady Cranford's ears long, long enough, "I dare not blame him, for I, too, am changed!"

The elder lady trembled violently. Truly, it was a strange confession for a young wife to pour into a mother's ears.

"My love," she said, "there is some mistake here. I knew my son's heart—he had no secrets from me—his mother!" Her tone was almost scornful in its conviction. "I know he never loved any one save yourself; and even had he done so, the love he gave his wife would have been so far higher and deeper than that, that it were a farce to name it. *Ours*, my dear, is an *honorable* line."

She rose as she said the words, and she gathered her lace-shawl round her in closer folds, and her stature seemed to heighten, and her fine face to grow more grand, more noble in its lineaments.

Helena did not reply. Together they went through the magnificent galleries, where many a lord and lady looked down upon them from the walls; and as the child glanced timidly at them, they seemed all to be repeating those words, "Ours is an honorable line."

There was not one among those who had worn the coronet in turn, more stately, or whose life had been more blameless than the widow of that Longleat whom she so truly mourned; and there was not one so fair, not one so peerless as she who, in her youth, trod before them like a queen, and yet on whom rested an unguessed stain. What a strange web fate had woven round the life of that girl!

It was an almost priceless blessing to the Dowager to have her son with her; but there was a shadow thrown over them all. Cranford's tenderness was the same in the old days; but his gravity never relaxed, and Helena grew paler and paler.

On the 24th of December, a letter came from Mr. Ross's doctor, stating that his illness was an intermittent, non-infectious fever. That he was so prostrated, that unless he were roused the danger was that he would sink under the attack. The Earl arranged to go up to town on the 26th, and, at his mother's suggestion, he resolved to take Helena for medical advice. She, herself, ridiculed

the proposal; but the idea of accompanying the Earl she gladly seized.

They arrived at Eglinton House rather late in the day. The carriage was ordered soon afterwards to take Lord Cranford to Mr. Ross's. Helena was sitting alone in a large, sombre room, that had a somewhat deserted look, through having been untenanted for some time, when the Earl joined her. He was touched by her apparent depression. "Will you drive with me, dear?" he asked kindly; "you will be so dull quite alone; or are you too tired?"

"Oh, no," she said, eagerly, and at once ran to her dressing-room, where she astonished Evans by her unusual energy.

Very little was said on their way to ——— Square. They both looked up at the windows as the carriage stopped; only one light could be seen, excepting that over the door.

"Knock gently," said the Earl to the footman; but before the muffled knocker could fall the door opened. Then a servant came down to the carriage. "How is Mr. Ross?"

"Very ill, my Lord. The doctors are with him now."

The Earl turned to Helena. "We had better go into the house," he said; "they may be some time."

They went in. A single lamp, burning in the capacious hall, served but to give an air of greater dreariness to its capacious width. There was that un-home like aspect about the place, which bachelors' residences always have, no matter what appliances wealth may bring. They were shown into a room, the first of a suite magnificently furnished—as the Countess saw when more lights were brought.

"Would you like to see the housekeeper, my Lord?" asked the man.

"I should."

In a few moments, an elderly, fresh-looking woman came in, one whom you would trust instinctively.

"Ah, Mrs. Heslop," said the Earl, "this is sad news."

She tried to answer, but could not.

"Is he very ill?"

"He has been in great danger, my Lord," she faltered at last. "I fear he is not out of it. He changes a good deal; but he scarcely eats or sleeps. It makes my heart ache, my Lord, to see him. I am glad you have come. You were always such friends, my Lord. I think he will surely take a turn when he sees you."

Neither of them had noticed how eagerly Helena, who sat in the distance, had listened to all that was said, or how tightly her fingers were laced, and how bloodless her face was.

Mrs. Heslop startled her by saying, "Will not your Ladyship be cold in this room? There is a fire in the library."

But the Countess would not go there. She said she preferred to remain where she was. Then Cranford went away to meet the doctors, and she was left alone. She sat motionless, with every sense quickened. There was profound silence through the great house. Once she heard a door open in the distance, and close gently; then a low voice was heard close to the room in which she sat, as if death were there. She could hear her heart beat. A clock in the room chimed the hour low and sweetly, but it startled her. Then Cranford came in with Dr. Elliott and another physician, who had just seen Mr. Ross for the first time. He left in a moment. Dr. Elliott remained. He was a brisk, kindly-mannered, elderly gentleman, very ruddy faced, with white hair and black brows, and a clear, beautiful eye that looked you through when he spoke, and inspired you with confidence.

"And he has been naming me?" said the Earl.

"He has, my Lord, he has. I have great faith in the effect of your interview with him."

Helena glided to her husband, and laid her hand upon his arm.

"Cranford, don't mind me; stay with him."

"I will, dear, if he wishes it."

Dr. Elliott looked at her, and the Earl introduced him to Helena.

"I have great faith, too, in Mr. Ross's unimpaired constitution," said the doctor, blandly, with a side glance at the Countess, of whose beauty he had heard so much.

"May I see him to-night?"

"Certainly; now, if you wish it. Allow me, my Lord." He touched the bell, and soon after Lord Cranford went with the footman to Glen's room.

The physician remained behind, and, rubbing his white hands gently, said politely, with professional suavity—

"You will find town quiet just now, my Lady."

An expression of agonized impatience contracted her brows. She said something which he could not understand.

"Are you very anxious about my patient?" he asked, kindly.

"Oh, *so* anxious!" she answered, with irrepressible excitement. Then, recollecting herself, she added, "He is our dearest friend."

This was said in a low voice, and the long black lashes drooped over her pale cheeks. Accustomed as the physician was to scenes of sorrow, there seemed to be something here beyond his comprehension.

"I assure your Ladyship that I have no fears for Mr. Ross now. The fact is, that what with travelling rapidly, then with over-work during the session, he has greatly taxed his nervous system; and so, when he took

cold, it assumed the form of intermittent fever. That will account for his great depression. Then, being unfortunately (with a bow) a bachelor, he has been in the charge of servants, and has felt the want of companionship, no doubt. I feel quite assured that, if your Ladyship will consent to be an auxiliary, you will further his advancement to health."

She did not answer, only her face flushed a little; but she blessed the speaker in her heart for his words of hope.

Had she entered his house only to see him die! In her sudden thought, careless of the watchful eyes, heedless of the surprise which her emotion might cause, she paced the room to and fro; and the doctor would not disturb her.

As Lord Cranford followed the footman, he was almost oppressed by the dreary stillness of the deserted-looking mansion. They went noiselessly over the thick velvet carpets, up the stairs, down two long passages to a door that stood a little open. In another moment the Earl had entered.

Mr. Ross was partially reclining; his white, wasted hands lay languidly on the sheet; his luxuriant hair clustered in damp masses upon the pillow. His eyes were a little sunken, but, rendered brilliant by the inward fever, they lighted up with a strange gleam when he saw his friend.

For a moment the Earl could not speak. He held Ross's hand, and they looked at each other unutterable things. Cranford smiled, but there were more tears than joy in his smile. Round his friend's mouth, firm as in his vigorous days, there stole a sweet expression. His soul seemed to be looking out of her windows, whilst hope winged her flight for ever. Never had Lord Cranford gazed on such mute, but such utter abandonment to despair.

"Old fellow!" he said, in a choked voice, conscious that he should give way if he did not speak lightly and at once, "how is this? What have you been doing? When do you mean to be yourself again?"

Glen turned aside his head. "Never better, Longleat, never better.

> 'My sails flap idly 'gainst the mast of my intent,
> When my prow should grate the golden isles.'"

His tone was inexpressibly mournful; it touched Cranford's inmost soul.

"Glen! old friend," he said, when he could speak, "you have much to live for."

There was no answer; the earnest eyes were fixed on the wall before him; so fixedly he gazed, that Cranford turned his head, and was startled to find Helena's face looking down from the wall.

He glanced round. There was no other picture in the room; and amid all the costly elegance of that apartment, it seemed to be the only bright spot there. He was more impressed by his friend's loneliness in those few moments than he had ever been. Indeed, it was impossible to think of it when Mr. Ross was in health—with his superabundant energy, and vigorous powers. Bending down he whispered, "She is here. Would you like to see her?"

A radiant answer flashed from his eyes.

"I will bring her," the Earl said—and went.

"May I take the Countess upstairs?" he inquired of the doctor. "Mr. Ross would like to see her."

"Certainly, my Lord. Angels can only bring healing on their wings," he said, smiling.

She slipped off her bonnet and mantle with woman's nursing instinct; and so, just as if she were at home, and had a right to tend him, she went with her husband to

Glen's room. There was no attendant there. Her light foot made no sound, and she stood beside the bed two or three moments before he opened his eyes. Then he met her look—so full of pain, of tender compassion, and of love!

He smiled, and held out his hand. "Little fairy," he whispered, "good little fairy!"

Her lips trembled, then settled into gravity again. For his sake she must be calm. When she dared to trust her voice, she said very softly, "We are grieved to find you so, Mr. Ross."

He gave her such a look, that to hide her own emotion she smoothed his pillow, and pushed the great wave of hair from his damp, pale brow.

"Head nurse at once, you see," said the Earl, cheerfully. "I know by experience that she *can* nurse. We will get you well, old fellow."

Ross closed his eyes—he longed to die then, just then with her hand in his; with her eyes gazing upon him as they were gazing then. Would it have been better so?

The Earl whispered that he would return directly; he wanted to speak to Dr. Elliott. He went away.

Presently Mr. Ross unclosed his eyes, and looked round languidly. He turned his face towards her, and their eyes met. If ever, since the world first listened to the story that is now so old, a single gaze of love, like a tide, swept down the barriers of right and wrong; swept aside holy ties, sacred claims, sternest duties; swept aside a past with its resolve, a future with its destiny; swept aside all hopes of heaven, all dread of hell—it was now!

She sank down, and hid her face in the coverlet, trembling as if the keenest of keen blasts were swaying her. He laid his hand upon her head. "My one ewe lamb!"

They seemed never to have been parted now—to be still standing in that far-off porch, with the morning sun shining on the scarlet bells and the jasmine-stars.

Helena almost fancied she heard the lake splash gently on the stones; fancied that if she looked up it would be upon the quiet valley, and the solemn hills. All the weary weeks of absence were blotted out, swept into oblivion by the touch of that hand, the sound of that voice calling her as in *that* hour his "one ewe lamb!"

"Darling child!" he whispered, "I have not forgotten. If I could only die now?"

She rose instantly.. "Hush!" she said, "don't talk of that." Then in an uncontrollable burst of feeling, she exclaimed, "What would the world be to me if you died? Oh, Glen, I have been desolate! as I said."

A crimson spot came into his cheek, his eyes were brilliant.

She was afraid for him, and calming herself, laid her cool hand upon his burning forehead.

So resting, he fell into his first tranquil sleep.

Who can tell what thoughts passed through her mind, as she watched there! Her husband's heart "trusted in her," yet not "safely." Did that thought pain her? Did Cranford's love for his friend move her to the good resolution, that no shadow through her should stain his honor? Who can tell? If the recording angel registered one vow, or one repentant tear then, neither vow nor tear might save her from the consequences of after sin.

He slept for two hours, so quietly, that she sometimes listened if he breathed.

Cranford had returned, the nurse had been in, had shaded the lamp and gone down again. The silence was death-like. Now and then a cinder would fall from the fire that was low: it sounded like a cannon. The clock-tick jarred upon her nerves, she so feared it would waken him.

Some leaves fluttered from a glass of withered flowers, and even their fall upon a piece of paper, could be distinctly heard. The distant bark of a dog made her heart beat fast; and the creaking of a door was torture. Still he slept—and the fire died quite out; and the lamp burned low. Helena's limbs trembled with standing and with cold—then from shivering she passed into an almost numb state; but she did not attempt to move; so those two watched whilst death battled for a life—and was conquered.

Glen opened his eyes suddenly.

The Earl rose; but Helena laid her finger upon her lips, and bending down—just looked at Mr. Ross. The old rare smile came into his face. He gave one hand to Cranford.

"Such a sleep you have had, Ross! a few more and ——" but Dr. Elliott entered, and after feeling his pulse, finished the sentence by saying,

"A few more such, and the corner is left far behind, my Lord."

When he saw that Helena was going, Mr. Ross, with a deprecating look at Cranford, raised her hand to his lips. His eyes followed her from the room. The Earl whispered, "You will see her again to-morrow." Perhaps that assurance caused him to have such a night of calm, tranquil rest.

When Helena entered her dressing-room, sooner than Evans expected, it seemed to her that years, instead of hours, had passed since she left it. Yet her travelling-dress lay upon the couch; the rings she had worn that same afternoon were scattered on the toilette; her watch, which she had left, showed how short the interval had been; the gold stopper of a scent-vase lay where it fell in her haste; the very flowers she had brought from Longleat in her band were not withered. Yet a whole life—a life of reunion, of awakened hope, of rescue from

despair, of intensified love—had passed since she handled these trifles! And that life was her own! How was it to end?

She pressed her hands upon her burning eyelids, and then calmly went to say "Good-night" to Cranford, for whom the carriage waited. It was misery to her to be thanked by him for her "unselfish interest" in his friend; to hear him so regret that he must leave her lonely. It was torture—and relief when she was alone.

Sunshine was streaming into her room when Lord Cranford awakened her with a kiss.

"My darling," he said, "Ross has had such a good night; he is a new man. You cured him, I am sure."

She was scarcely awake; her cheeks were warmly flushed; her eyes had a pretty look of babe-like wonder; her hair streamed over the pillows.

She was a fair vision in his sight that 27th of December—a vision that never faded from his memory.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Where are you, little dreamer! At Eglinton—and Glen is better."

"How glad you seem!"

"Glad! I feel as if I were going to his marriage, and when that comes to pass it will set all the bells in my soul ringing."

His marriage!

The words sounded like a death-knell in her ear.

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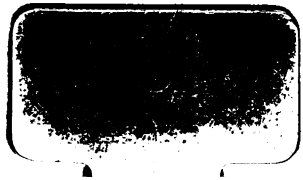
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